

SIGHT & SOUND

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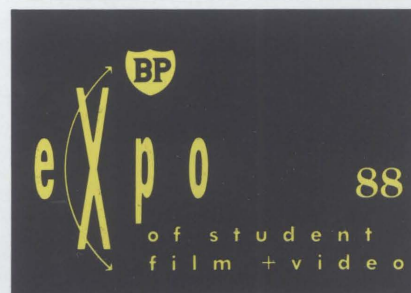


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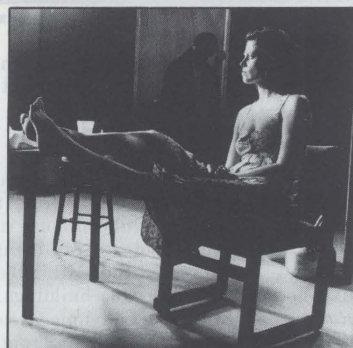
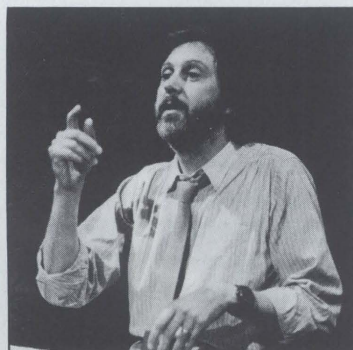
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On the cover:
Derek Jarman's *War Requiem*.
Photo: David Bramley.

In the Picture Revolutionary Riga/Jeremy Thomas/Utrecht and Ghent/Toronto/Venice/Condition Critical/San Sebastian/Lindenstrasse/1988 Obituary. **2**

◀ **Changing Channels** Anthony Smith reflects on the changing faces of television and on his series of Guardian lectures with David Puttnam, Michael Grade, Paul Fox and Jeremy Isaacs. **8**

Dish-Up: The Prospect for Britain Julian Petley discusses the cable revolution that won't ignite and the satellite launchings that probably will. **11**

Defence: A Prospect for Europe Theresa FitzGerald reports on the European Commission's new script-development fund and MEDIA programme. **14**

Passing Go: Europe's Media Moguls Play Monopoly William Fisher follows the progress across Europe of Murdoch, Maxwell, Berlusconi and Kirch. **16**

Framed Ian Cameron on Mark Shivas, BBC TV's new Head of Drama **20**

◀ **Sundance** Anne Thompson reports on Robert Redford's Sundance Institute, a workshop where developing talent meets Hollywood craftsmanship. **22**

In the Cascina Jonathan Keates reflects on the Italian singularity of Ermanno Olmi. **27**

Secret Affinities Thomas Elsaesser celebrates the centenary of the birth of F. W. Murnau. **33**

Double Takes Jarman's *War Requiem*; PR images of British films; children at MOMI: Ferdinand investigates. **40**

◀ **The Producer & the Script Girl** Peter Brunette talks to the olympian producer Anatole Dauman; and Gerald Peary to Truffaut's former helmpate—now a director in her own right—Suzanne Schiffman. **44**

Mackendrickland Philip Kemp, author of a forthcoming book on the director Alexander Mackendrick, maps the landscape. **48**

Cronenberg's Creative Cancers Alan Stanbrook on a theory of evolutionary illness in the horror films of David Cronenberg. **54**

LFF Jill Forbes on the 32nd London Film Festival **58**

◀ **Film Reviews** Bird/Tucker/A Short Film About Killing/High Hopes/A Fish Called Wanda. **61**

Book Reviews Enigma/Hullabaloo in Old Jeypore/The Hollywood Story & Hollywood and the Box Office/Horror film books/Television and Its Audience/Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide. **66**

Letters **70**

On Now **72**

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REVOLUTIONARY RIGA

The first Soviet independent film festival

Riga, we learned from a fiercely nationalistic guide, was where Baron Munchausen finally married and settled down. Yes, of course he was a real person—this in answer to the obvious surprise of a dozen film-makers and critics from almost as many countries, who were still finding the whole atmosphere of the Arsenal First International Film Forum somewhat unreal. Later that night, we would enter a converted church through an arch of (occupied) chicken-coops to find a surrealist carnival in full swing, with Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* being beamed down on to a circular screen of eggshells, a gigantic 8ft high zoetrope and assorted 'living sculptures' posing for (and occasionally stalking) the seemingly unfazed citizens of Riga.

The Forum had not (like the Baron) sprung out of thin air. It followed an equally remarkable but wholly domestic event held in 1986, which made an early contribution to Soviet cinema's *perestroika* with a public 'Monument to the Unfilmed Scripts' and generated the impetus for 1988's most ambitious 'first Soviet independent film festival'. Independent, that is, in both senses: as free as possible from the dead hand of Moscow's conservative bureaucracy; and providing the first-ever screening of the western—and indeed East European—avant-garde cinema that has hitherto only been a matter of hearsay within the Soviet Union.

So, from Britain came David Curtis with a programme drawn mainly from the London Film-Makers' Co-op. Annette Michelson, better known to her hosts as a leading American scholar of classic Soviet cinema, resumed an earlier role as exponent of the vintage 'new American cinema' of Brakhage, Snow, Jacobs and Conner. From Poland came Jozef Robakowski with his own *From a Window* and a retrospective boldly titled 'Free Polish Camera'; while Czech and German programmes also emphasised the continuity between pre- and postwar traditions of experiment and the unity-in-diversity of the international film avant-garde. Add ten-film Godard and Jancsó retrospectives plus early Forman and Chytilova, and two films each by Kumar Shahani and Mani Kaul, and the ambition of the Forum's organisers becomes awe-inspiring.

Among the film-makers who

attended in person were the minimalist Peter Gidal, showing his new *Guilt* and 1983 ultra-formalist Nicaragua film *Close Up*; Czech animator Jan Svankmajer, amazingly making his Soviet debut (largely thanks to some prior lobbying by his western admirers); and theorist turned cinema historian Noël Burch. But catching up was only one priority for the Forum's organisers. As pointers to the future, they had Jean-Luc Laguerre presenting a selection of the European multi-media productions that he and Raul Ruiz are engaged on at Le Havre, while Vera Body brought the continuing *Infermental* collaborative video anthology that she and her late husband Gabor started in Berlin in 1980.

My own interest was mainly in the Soviet rarities which had been promised, and I wasn't disappointed. Pride of place went to Aleksandr Sokurov, who had taken time off from shooting his new adaptation of *Madame Bovary* to attend the Forum. On show were a selection of his shorts, including a 'ten years later' documentary *Maria* and the enigmatic *Evening Sacrifice*, and his latest feature, *Days of Eclipse*.

This last, shot in two weeks in the Soviet Middle East, is a film of rare beauty and aching, alienated intensity—though illuminated with flashes of fantastic humour. Ostensibly it's about a young doctor who is also—shades of Chekhov—struggling to be a writer in the barren exile of a desert town. But its roots lie deep in the fertile soil of Russian

mysticism, laced with Futurist bravado. Imagine the aesthetic shock of early Wenders with the ascetic intensity of later Bresson and you will have some impression of this remarkable work.

Films by two of Sokurov's Leningrad colleagues, *Shooting in Africa*, a documentary about the poet Gumilev by Igor Alimpiev, and Viktor Semeniuk's nocturnal vox-pop *Public Railway*, confirmed the impression that this is the current centre of Soviet cinema's renovation. But there was also impressive work from the Baltic republics on show. Apart from Priit Pañ's devastating animated narrative *Breakfast on the Grass*, the best local feature I saw was from Lithuania: Algimantas Puipa's *The Eternal Light* is a period romance staged in the Nordic silent style to fine effect.

But the Baltic speciality is undoubtedly documentary, ranging from Mark Soosar's Estonian whimsical ethnographic fables to the sterner Latvian tradition that stems from Hercs Franks' example. Franks' own *Older By 10 Minutes* is an inspired unbroken ten-minute study of a child's face, absorbed in watching a performance—which was shot in 1978 by Juris Podnieks, now famous as the director of *Is It Easy to Be Young?*

Too many other discoveries (and a few disappointments, like Dikhovichny's pretentious *The Black Monk*) to recount here. But Kira Muratova's powerful, eccentric Somerseset Maugham adaptation *Change of Fortune*, and Yuri Mamin's *The Fountain*, a kind of black Ealing comedy of

perestroika, are both major works that augur well for the future.

The lasting memory of Riga for many, however, will be Naum Kleiman's walking tour of Eisenstein sites—from the (disputed) childhood home and nearby school to a breathtaking street of father Mikhail's opulent *art nouveau* buildings. Eisenstein films had indeed something to live up to; and aptly, with its Forum, Riga inaugurated a new era of East-West communication.

IAN CHRISTIE

AFTER THE EMPEROR

Jeremy Thomas' Japanese millions

The first film scripted by playwright Arthur Miller since *The Misfits* in 1961 goes into production in New England in January. Announcing the start of *Everybody Wins*, a story of an innocent convicted of murder and what sounds like a classic Arthur Miller blast at small-town corruption, producer Jeremy Thomas, 39, tactfully regretted that none of the British banks, including Hill Samuel, which had backed his previous film, *The Last Emperor*, was so far participating in his new \$120m deal, struck in conjunction with his sales partner Terry Glinwood, for the production over the next three years of six international features.

As of last November, Thomas



Surrealism in Riga: a 'living sculpture' from the exhibition.

said, *The Last Emperor*, which had cost \$30m (\$25m plus the price of borrowing the money) and swept the board at the 1988 Oscars, had taken \$34m net profit, exclusive of worldwide tv and video revenue. 'It could make 100 per cent profit.' Despite these figures, and although each of the five British and European banks which participated in *The Last Emperor* is now doing business in China, Thomas continues to find the City shy of film finance. He looked to the Japanese company Shochikui-Fuji ('rather like Rank in the 50s') for the bulk—\$50m—of his new money. A further \$10m comes from guaranteed presales in Japan and the rest from a group of European banks led by Pierson Heldring and Pierson. Orion will distribute *Everybody Wins* in the United States; but none of the other features will go into production before as yet to be negotiated us distribution deals have been signed.

'The Japanese have perfected the hardware of the film industry,' Thomas said. 'They are now looking for the software.' As well as *Everybody Wins*, starring Nick Nolte and Debra Winger, director Karel Reisz, Thomas' roster includes an adaptation by David Cronenberg of *The Naked Lunch* ('I'd like Dennis Hopper to play William Burroughs, but I haven't asked him yet'), and versions of Herman Melville's cannibal tale *Typee*, director Jonathan Demme, and Jerzy Kosinski's *Passion Play*, about the obsessions of a middle-aged polo-player, director Marek Kaniévski. There is also a film by Nagisa Oshima, with whom Thomas worked on *Merry Christmas*, *Mr Lawrence*, about Sessue Hayakawa, the only Japanese actor of the silent period to have become a Hollywood star; and a sixth project in development about the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In a separate deal, Thomas is also nurturing another feature with Bernardo Bertolucci, though on this his lips remained sealed.

How had Thomas pulled off this deal, the biggest of its kind, with the Japanese? 'Two years of meetings sitting in restaurants drinking sake.' Had he any interest in making smaller-budget 'British' pictures? Not at the moment: for the time being his outlook appeared to be global, 'I'm drawn to exotic material—with a touch of eroticism.' The new films would be shot worldwide and he was looking for 75 per cent of his returns from outside the United States. Would he make another *Last Emperor*? It had taken four years and involved 10,000 people: he thought not.

JOHN PYM

UTRECHT AND GHENT Bicycle fishers

There is, of course, no such thing as a Benelux film, any more than there is such a thing as Benelux. Its two main partners, Belgium and the Netherlands, have about as much in common culturally as England and Ireland. Interesting, though, to be able to compare their annual cinema showcases, separated as they are by thirteen days and a finger's width on the map of Europe.

Since 1981, Utrecht has been the home, every September, of an amiable event called the Dutch Film Days. It's a good place to hold it. Utrecht has a man who is employed full-time to fish bicycles out of the canals, and who provides the DFD with a useful metaphor. Like some float-on from a Terry Gilliam film, he punts along in a specially designed barge with a specially designed retrieving pole, filling his boat with dripping pushbikes.

The fact that he exists at all says a lot about the Dutch, combining a thoughtful, economy-minded and socially conscious response to reality with an almost anarchic carelessness: fishing them out is obviously a Good Idea, but just how did so many bikes get into the canal in the first place?

The best Dutch films of the year had the same mix of the meticulous and the throwaway. But 1987-88 was not, in general, a good season for film-making in

Holland, with twelve new features released but only five starting production. It looks as though the mathematics are beginning to catch up with the Dutch film industry: the maximum budget that can be raised at home, even with extensive state support, has finally been exceeded by the minimum cost of production.

The 1988 line-up offered two potentially interesting premieres: the English-language *Shadowman*, a first feature by Polish emigré Piotr Andreyev, and George Sluizer's Franco-Dutch co-production *Spoorios* (*The Vanishing*). In the event, *Shadowman* turned out to be a disaster. *The Vanishing*, coming from one of Holland's quirkier directors, was also a bit of a disappointment, though it had precisely that bikes-in-the-canal quality of stylistic rigour combined with random carelessness. The story of a Dutchman who becomes understandably obsessed by the total disappearance of his girlfriend during a holiday in France, *The Vanishing* has major problems of tone and structure. It is, however, frequently intriguing and remains strongly watchable throughout, thanks to the performance of French actor Bernard-Pierre Donnadiou as the psychopath who has abducted the girl.

Chabrol it isn't, despite nods in that direction, but *The Vanishing* won the DFD's top prize, the Golden Calf, in a ceremony of which the bicycle fisher would doubtless have approved—a chaotic combination of kitsch and incompetence in which the entertainers looked as

though they were auditioning for *Game for a Laugh* and the presenter spent his time insulting Dutch films and film-makers. The other awards went to Pieter Verhoeff's *Van geluk gesproken* (*Count Your Blessings*), a sprawling black comedy-cum-melodrama whose ambition to provide a slice of contemporary Dutch life made it more consistently enjoyable (as well as a better film) than *The Vanishing*. Verhoeff's previous films—*The Dream* (1985), a Friesian-language saga of early Dutch socialism, and a moody rural drama called *The Sign of the Beast* (1981)—had shown him to be a director capable of combining broad gestures with an eye for detail, above all performance detail. *Count Your Blessings*, in fact, was very much a bicycle fisher's film.

Two weeks later, the International Film Festival of Flanders in Ghent offered both an overview of Belgium's annual output and an excellent international 'year's best' choice, all put together with a degree of efficiency that knocks the clogs off Utrecht. Its prize-giving ceremony, the annual Joseph Plateau Awards for the best Belgian films, was in total contrast to the slaphappy anarchy of the Golden Calf awards. Looking, as one guest put it, like an Eastern European Eurovision Song Contest, it had a full orchestra and interminable chats with the celebrity 'presenters'.

The films on offer were better, though, with best Belgian film award going to Michel Khleifi's brave and beautiful *Noces en Galilée*, best actor to Gian-Maria Volonté for André Delvaux's rather glum 1988 Cannes entry *L'Oeuvre au Noir* (*The Abyss*), and best actress to Marianne Bassler for Marion Hänsel's intense and disturbing *Les Noces barbares*, the most promising mainstream art movie of either event. The fact that the first film was directed by a Palestinian and the other two were co-productions with France, however, serves to underline the problems faced by Belgian cinema: it certainly has the film-makers (Hänsel, Delvaux, Akerman, Harry Kumel, Robbe De Hert, Dominique Derudere), but rarely the funds.

Younger film-makers, in particular, find it hard to make their films, rather than the films the French want them to make. The international success of Derudere's *Crazy Love* could change that, though, and the director is about to start work on a US-Belgian co-production, *Wait Until Spring, Bandini*, on which Francis Coppola will be executive producer.

Luck does not always seem to

Jeremy Thomas.



be on the side of Belgian filmmakers, though. The one Flemish film scheduled for screening in Utrecht, *Hong Kong*, starring local comedians Gaston and Leo, was the victim of some Tatiesque label-reading in the dispatch department at Brussels airport and ended up at Kai Tak rather than Schiphol. The Dutch thought this was hysterical, the Belgians rather less so.

NICK RODDICK

TORONTO

North America's third film centre

Just as people can come to look like their dogs, film festivals seem to take much of their tone from the places that house them. Not, perhaps, a parallel to be pushed too far, but it's certainly true of Toronto, a confident, well-ordered and congenial festival, already in its thirteenth year very large but still growing, like the sprawling but orderly city it inhabits.

In her second year as festival director, Helga Stephenson in 1988 had a budget of 2.5m Canadian dollars, with a fair slice of the cash coming from sponsors, such as the beer company whose logo must be the festival's most screened image. Essentially, this is a public festival, in a city which ranks as North America's third film centre (after Los Angeles and New York) and is also the home of Cineplex Odeon, the exhibition chain now active in Britain. The festival congratulates itself on its audiences. It congratulates its audiences as well—for their perspicacity or simply for being there. The price of such a high public profile—more than

250,000 tickets sold, one reads—is queues. 'I didn't come all the way from Australia to be prevented from doing my job,' scolds one critic when the house full notices go up. This being Toronto, within ten minutes we are safely in the cinema.

The festival wants to attract more European attention, but looks to have been cruelly clobbered in 1989 by a direct clash of dates with Venice. Toronto can't move to a later date without bumping into Vancouver, and can't start earlier without cutting across its closest rival, Montreal. One could hardly have a clearer example of the present worldwide traffic jam, which finds all the festivals chasing each other's tails.

Meanwhile, Toronto's team of programmers takes a large view of things. The BFI's Ian Christie mounted a Soviet retrospective, 49 titles, from *The Cranes Are Flying* to *Commissar*. A more modest retrospective of the work of the brothers Aki and Mika Kaurismäki, Finnish filmmakers whose names are hardly household words even in movie-going households, mustered eight films. I caught only one, Aki Kaurismäki's *Hamlet Goes Business* (1987), which has some effective jokes and contrivances but not quite enough to justify its presumption.

A random sampling of films. Fernando Solanas' *South*, about a newly released prisoner wandering the night streets of Buenos Aires, reawakening memories and ghosts, is a major work: haunting in its imagery, even if some felt the wind and mist machines were on overtime, strict in its reckoning with Argentina's past and future. Claude Chabrol's *Une Affaire de femmes*, also seen at Venice,

concerns an abortionist (Isabelle Huppert) in Vichy France who is eventually executed *pour encourager les autres*. Lashings of character, most of it unappealing, and atmosphere you could cut with a knife: when he wants to be, there is no more effectively solid film-maker. And from another survivor of the old New Wave, Luc Moullet, comes *La Comédie du Travail*, an ironic study of work, or more properly its absence, centred on an employment office and fizzing with slow-fuse humour. Why did the London Festival miss out on this one?

Calling the Shots, by Janis Cole and Holly Dale, is an intriguing study of women filmmakers, with a strong North American bias—Jeanne Moreau is one of relatively few who drift in from the great world outside. Interviews are intercut, stories of stress and strain related, including some nice lines in self-deprecation, like the tale of the director who arrived on set clutching her handbag but not having thought to bring her script. The film emphasises difficulty; but the strong impression it leaves is of how many women directors there are, and how buoyant most of them seem.

Rob Tregenza's *Talking to Strangers* is made up of nine ten-minute takes: a one-off film, in which a self-absorbed young man has various encounters, some stranger than others. Some segments predictably lose themselves halfway; some were hardly worth the effort; but at least three have a riveting, worrying immediacy. Not a bad score, for a first feature walking a tightrope without a safety net. Tregenza comes from Baltimore; Tony Buba from Braddock, an

outpost of Pittsburgh. *Lightning Over Braddock*, also a first feature, is the culmination of some twelve years during which Buba has been making documentaries about the decaying fortunes of his home town: a film about making a film, with the director backing coyly into his own lime-light, as the quirky poet of a run-down steel town. Buba looks to have invented his own brand of regional cinema: striking, sad, funny and self-conscious.

The programme note for *We Think the World of You*, Colin Gregg's film for Channel 4 from the J. R. Ackerley novel, was informative about Ackerley's literary connections. Gregg's film is agreeable and notably well played by Alan Bates, though a little frail for the big screen. Later, a stranger introduced himself at a festival gathering. Had I seen the film? Should his English literature class see it, for insights into Isherwood and Forster? 'Well, no,' I say. 'Actually, it's a film about a dog.'

PENELOPE HOUSTON

VENICE

Chabrol, Rudolph, Sembène look to the past...

Venice, usually one of the most relaxed of festivals, was girding itself for battle in 1988. A tide of religious reaction was expected to rise up against *The Last Temptation of Christ*, but signs of danger were being looked for, almost hoped for, everywhere. At his press conference, the agelessly owlish Claude Chabrol was asked if he didn't think his film *Une affaire de femmes* could be charged with blasphemy, since it includes a scene in which Isabelle Huppert, sentenced to the guillotine for moral crimes in wartime France, invokes the name of the Virgin in less than reverent terms.

Chabrol shrugged off the question, but his interlocutor was not to be denied this thrill of danger. Had M Chabrol heard that the festival was threatened by a march of Italian housewives, directed at the Scorsese film but which might be expected to sweep all before it? As it happened, *Une affaire de femmes* did have its day in court, tried and apparently cleared by magistrates of the blasphemy charge. But by then the danger seemed to have rolled away, as had the housewives' crusade.

A powerful film, denying itself all the easy options of its subject, *Une affaire de femmes* was more deserving of the first prize than *The Legend of the Holy Drinker*, with which Ermanno Olmi won it for the second year running.

Fernando Solanas' *South*.

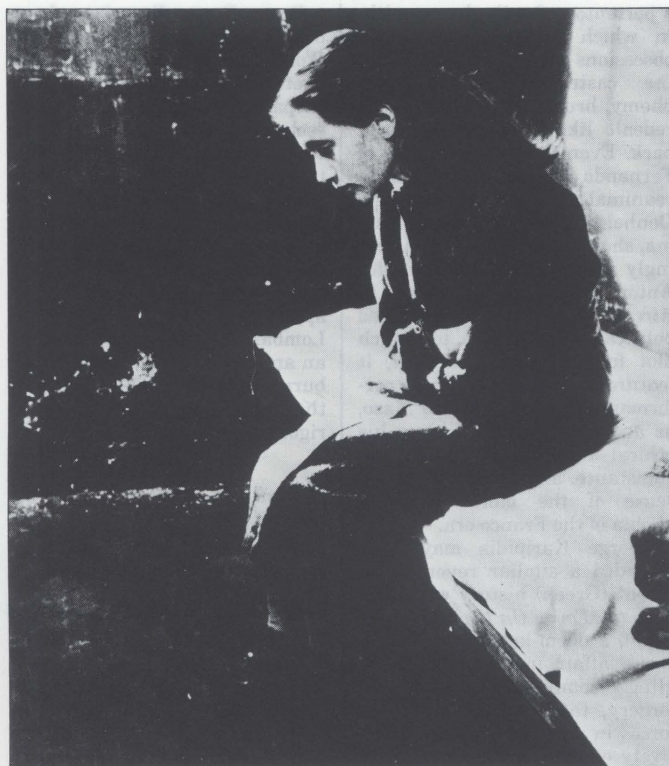


As if to compensate for everyone else's blasphemy, Olmi's is a gently religious film, about a man who can't quite make it back to church, but repays a spiritual debt as promised. A curious Anglo-French co-production, curiously cast in Rutger Hauer and Anthony Quayle, the film elaborates the life out of a short story by Joseph Roth before the hero can be touched by his epiphany. But history, not religion, was the animating theme of this festival—as the Hungarian director of *El Dorado*, in the press conference before Chabrol's, inadvertently indicated when he answered a convoluted question about his technique, and the 'forgotten narrative', by talking of the need to discover 'forgotten history'.

Perhaps this is what *Une affaire de femmes* does for Pétain's France. The history of Paris in the 20s has not exactly been forgotten, and so Alan Rudolph's *The Moderns* is more about history refracted—refracted through an era that was a celebration of the art of a previous era, refracted through the story of a struggling painter (Keith Carradine) who becomes a forger of that art, led on by a poseur (Geraldine Chaplin) and a villain (John Lone) who takes lessons from Harry Houdini, and refracted through a visual style that seems to be all *trompe l'oeil* and mirror shots. It's as brilliantly artificial as Rudolph's earlier *Welcome to L.A.*

Theo Angelopoulos' *Landscape in the Mist*, which has two children trekking across Europe in search of the father they do not know, but whom they believe is in Germany, was in the spirit of Rossellini, a picture of the economic and spiritual dislocation of the *Gastarbeiter* phenomenon. History was also made in Carlo Lizzani's *Dear Gorbachev*, which takes its title from the letter written recently by Anna Larina, the widow of Nicolai Bukharin, discredited revolutionary and Stalinist victim, to have him reinstated. What follows is a dotty soap opera, set during the 'last night' in the Bukharin *ménage*, with Harvey Keitel as the revolutionary at the end of his tether.

The festival's most enjoyable oddity, in scale and exuberance, was Franco Zeffirelli's *Young Toscanini*. This unblushing melodrama, set in Rio in 1886, has Arturo (C. Thomas Howell)—body and soul dedicated to music—romancing a novice nun and, more prosaically, flattering a tricky prima donna (Elizabeth Taylor) into attending rehearsals. The climax is the first night of a production of *Aida*, when the prima donna,



Isabelle Huppert in *Une affaire de femmes*.

surrounded by perplexed Negroes, imperiously halts the show and lectures her lover the Emperor (whiskery Philippe Noiret) on the iniquities of slavery. The Italian press began by catcalling the director's front credit (the pious Zeffirelli had, it seemed, reneged on an undertaking to withdraw his film from the festival in protest at the inclusion of *The Last Temptation of Christ*), but by the end were cheering with pleasure and, perhaps, disbelief.

An inglorious episode of French colonialism, the shelling in 1944 of a 'mutinous' group of West African infantrymen awaiting demobilisation in Dakar after active service in Europe, was memorialised at leisurely African pace in Ousmane Sembène and Thierno Faty Sow's *Camp de Thiaroye*. Shot through with dry, off-centre humour and held together by a dignified central performance by Ibrahima Sane as the droll barrack-room lawyer, with a taste for classical music and French literature, and whose secret weapon is his unexpected forbearance, the picture is probably too long, and a shade too indulgent, for western tastes. It speaks, however, with an authentic, identifiable human voice.

Another sort of authenticity runs through David Burton Morris' *Patti Rocks*, which is cast in the old-fashioned, one might almost say moribund form of the road movie. Two men, neither young nor yet quite middle-aged, held somewhat uncertainly

together by the friendship of their youth, drive from St Paul, Minnesota, through a long crisp winter night to pay an unexpected call on the woman of the title whom one of them believes he has made pregnant. A sequel, many years on, to the director's *Loose Ends*, this scabrous slip-sliding comedy of male attitudes and anxieties is beautifully modulated and fluently acted by Chris Mulkey and John Jenkins. What makes the film special, however, is its journey's end: Patti (Karen Landry), affectionate, grown-up in a way neither of the men are, humorous and answerable to nobody (in short the human face of feminism), deftly and surprisingly turns the tables.

Andrew Birkin's *Burning Secret*, from the story by Stefan Zweig, finds an Austrian Baron (Klaus Maria Brandauer), nursing his own hidden wounds, spending Christmas 1919 in a grand snowbound mountain hotel. Casting himself as a latter-day Erl King, he is kind to a small boy (David Eberts) in order to seduce his mother (Faye Dunaway). The rituals of hotel life are marvellously caught in Ernest Day's lush camerawork and the film brims over with the sensitivity one would expect from the creator of *The Lost Boys*, the masterly television play on J. M. Barrie. Brandauer gives an immensely suggestive performance: his likeability exactly calculated to appeal to a boy with Ian Richardson's icy British Ambassador for a father.

RICHARD COMBS/JOHN PYM

CONDITION CRITICAL

European film critics meet in London

What is the future for film criticism? The question was addressed at a two-day international symposium organised last November by the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI), with critics and journalists from seven countries, including the USSR, in attendance.

The symposium was divided into four separate sections, though debates tended to spill over into each other; and at the top of the list, not surprisingly, was the question of the Vanishing Critic, as the organisers headlined it. British critics tend to look enviously at the amount of writing about cinema that goes on in France, and so were surprised to hear a pessimistic analysis by Michel Ciment (*Positif*) of the situation there. It is not so much that film magazines or film columns in the press are disappearing, but that the space for informed criticism is steadily shrinking. Ciment cited the way new releases such as *The Last Temptation of Christ* or Luc Besson's *Le Grand Bleu* are treated as media events, with interviews, gossip and background articles edging out discussion of the films. A British participant pointed to the expansion of the *Guardian's* Screen pages as another example of the more-means-less tendency; and Derek Malcolm himself complained of the growing obsession with listings, citing his own paper's demand for 'three lines on each of the best films in the London Film Festival'.

The distinction between film journalist, film critic and film academic was something the symposium tried but failed to come to grips with. This has partly to do with a shortage of information about the different institutional bases from which writers operate, though Peter Cargin, Secretary of FIPRESCI's British branch, had sent out a useful preliminary questionnaire in the interest of building up a comparative picture.

What emerged most strikingly, however, was the huge gulf that seems to exist between critics in Western and Eastern Europe. Although there were certainly differences of opinion between, say, Michel Ciment and Lino Micciché, the common mood among western critics was one of doubt and uncertainty. No such hesitation for Nina Zarhi, from the USSR. To hear her speaking so confidently about taking banned films off the

shelves, the launch of festivals in Odessa and Riga, the role of the critic in the 'establishment of competent, authoritative public control over film-making to replace the state administration which is being dismantled' and 'achieving true freedom of thought and real independence' was to realise not simply how much things have changed in the USSR, but also the differences which exist even between FIPRESCI's European members.

JULIAN PETLEY

SAN SEBASTIAN

Political angles

'La verdad es una opinión,' noted the slogan scrawled on the ornate facade of San Sebastian's Municipal Library; a timely enough reminder, given an event so inherently contentious as an international film festival. 'Donostia kontra,' added an adjacent graffito—Donostia being the city's Basque name. This latter message was graphically underlined, on the penultimate day of the festival, by some unscheduled fireworks following the shooting down on a nearby street of an ETA leader, by all accounts unarmed at the time.

The fellow-feeling of one proudly distinct minority for another may well have enhanced audience response to Andrew Grieve's Welsh Border saga, *On the Black Hill*, every reference to the English oppressor eliciting appreciative chuckles. Though presumably discounting such local considerations, the international jury none the less awarded it the top prize of the Golden Shell, welcome recognition for a film sadly undervalued on its UK release.

The Silver Shell went to a Spanish film, *Rowing with the Wind*, which moved into territory not long vacated by Ken Russell's *Gothic*—Byron, Shelley, assorted Godwins and of course the Monster—and boasted moodily blustering settings, some striking visual ideas, and a talented, largely British cast: Hugh Grant (a dangerous, ironic Byron), Lizzy McInnerny, Elizabeth Hurley. Showing commendable valour, they battled with an English script every bit as ragged (if rarely quite so downright silly) as Russell's. It is credited to the director Gonzalo Suárez, who blithely admits that before initiating the project he 'didn't know a great deal about these literary personages.'

As usual these days, thrillers—laced with a greater or lesser political content—seemed to be the dominant genre. Francisco Regueiro's *Diario de Invierno* (*Winter Diary*) set out as noirish policier, but headed rapidly into

a portentous family drama within which all the old Iberian obsessions—the whore-mother, the castrating father, blasphemy, brutality and blood—are redealt like a dog-eared Tarot pack. Even the practised skill of Fernando Rey could do little to reanimate the clichés. Rey, the Denholm Elliott of Spanish cinema, showed up again in a charmingly inconsequential cameo for Antonio Isasi-Isasmendi's *El Aire de un Crimen*, a convoluted political thriller with too much plot for its own good. Still, it featured a nicely perplexed performance from José María Maza, as an Army captain finding his ethical absolutes eroded by circumstance, and conveyed a vivid sense of the moral claustrophobia of the Franco era.

George Karipidis may have intended a similar reversion to recent (Greek) history with *Stin Skia tou Fovou* (*In the Shadow of Fear*), a doom-laden and Kafkaesque affair in which a struggling composer, accused of forgery, takes off with sinister forces in pursuit. The film effectively exploits a Greece well off the tourist beat, all disused factories and overcast skies. But given a hero gripped by terminal gloom even before disaster strikes, Karipidis risks depressing his audience to much the same level. Recent political enormities also fuelled Jeannine Meerapfel's moving and impassioned *La Amiga*, with Liv Ullmann outstanding as the mother of an Argentinian 'desaparecido'. Beside these all too well-attested horrors, Karipidis' dank cellars and shadowy corridors showed for the literary connoisseurs they are; in Argentina as elsewhere, oppression sits in clean, well-lit offices and smiles sympathetically while explaining that, alas, nothing can be done to help.

From Peru, Francisco Lombardi's *La Boca del Lobo* (*The Wolf's Jaws*) brought Hollywood's Vietnam cycle to mind—but surpassed its models in skilfully eschewing rhetoric, and building to its climax with grimly controlled power. Set in a remote Andean village, where a handful of young recruits vainly combat unseen guerrillas, it traces with inexorable logic the steps whereby group loyalty leads to an appalling complicity of guilt. Lombardi's film, which picked up an amply deserved Special Prize, burns with a clear-eyed anger, the more potent for being so rigorously contained.

PHILIP KEMP

LINDENSTRASSE

The man who brought the soaps to Germany

The show they said would never get on German television has had the last laugh. *Lindenstrasse*, the first German soap opera, has just celebrated its third year on the air, with ratings showing that almost half the country watches it every Sunday evening, in a pre-primetime spot that was once reserved for major sporting and musical events.

The phenomenal success of *Lindenstrasse* is particularly sweet to its creator, the 47-year-old film director Hans W. Geissendörfer (*Jonathan*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Glass Cell*). It took me a whole year just to bring together the various drama department chiefs of Germany's nine regional TV systems,' Geissendörfer said in his office at the WDR Studio in Cologne, where *Lindenstrasse* is shot on a permanent set that is the largest and most expensive in German history. It cost 20 million DM to

build, and contains the show's main street, two side streets, dozens of apartment building and shop exteriors, a bus stop, kiosks and interiors including kitchens, living rooms and a Greek restaurant.

'There was strong resistance to the idea of a weekly soap opera,' Geissendörfer said. 'I won the chiefs over not only by giving them a precise story outline and character breakdown but by pointing out that if German TV was to survive as a producer, it would have to take the risk of creating new shows instead of always, buying them from abroad.'

Geissendörfer wrote, produced and directed the first thirty episodes. 'I had to do everything, because we didn't have writers or directors who could handle soap-opera techniques. In three years, however, I have been able to train several assistants who are now taking over much of the writing and directing.' He also broke new ground by hiring actors on long-term contracts, something that only the state-run theatres had previously done. 'At the moment, we have about 35 actors in the permanent company. We shoot on film, rather than tape, with four or five cameras in operation, sometimes simultaneously, to catch the flow of life on *Lindenstrasse*.'

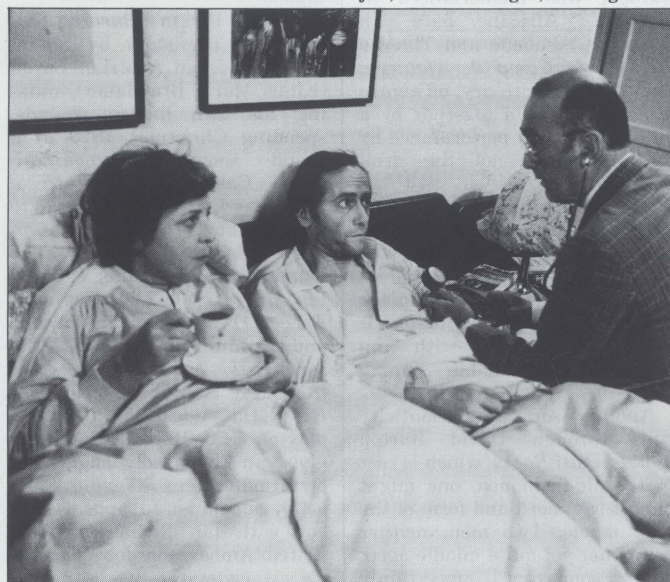
'I have an English wife and spent a lot of time in Britain, and I patterned the show after Granada's *Coronation Street*. It isn't a German *Dallas*, as it's sometimes called. The main characters, Berta and Wolfe, are lower middle-class, educated, in their late thirties, but the other characters represent a cross-section of West Germany today, and along with the domestic strife and love stories we deal with social issues—crime, unemployment, AIDS, politics.'

Lindenstrasse came under attack during its first season for its frank treatment of social problems. 'Der Bild and other right-wing papers criticised us for being too liberal and started a campaign to have us moved from the first and most important channel to Channel Three, but the public protested and we not only kept our position but improved our ratings. Today the show is watched by 15-16 million viewers a week.'

Geissendörfer now acts mainly as story editor and executive producer of the show he partly owns (along with ARD, the First Channel). 'I would like to go back to making feature films, but I will never turn my back on *Lindenstrasse* completely. I would like it to do what *Coronation Street* has done, stay on the air for thirty years. Perhaps even for ever.'

WILLARD MANUS

Lindenstrasse: Marie-Louise Marjan, Joachim Luger, Ludwig Haas.



1988 OBITUARY

DECEMBER 1987: Rouben Mamoulian; Denis Sanders, earnest film-maker, often in collaboration with brother Terry (*A Time Out of War*, *Crime and Punishment USA*); Irving Allen, partner in Warwick Films in the 1950s, then independent producer (*Long Ships*, *Cromwell*); Ralph Nelson, director and emotionalist (*Lilies of the Field*, *Soldier Blue*); Alice Terry, wife of and leading lady for Rex Ingram; Josef Myrow, composer, songwriter (*Mother Wore Tights*, *Wabash Avenue*); Gustav Fröhlich, the hero of *Metropolis*, occasional director; Leslie Arliss, director, notably at Gainsborough (*The Man in Grey*, *The Wicked Lady*).

JANUARY: Manuel Octavio Gómez, Cuban film-maker (*First Charge of the Machete*, *Days of Water*); William Cagney, James' producer brother; Michel Auclair, sulky-looking postwar lead (*La Belle et la Bête*, *Manon*); Trevor Howard; Hugh A. Robertson, black film-maker, editor of *Midnight Cowboy*; Jean Mitry, slaphappy film historian and director of pretension (*Pacific 231*, *Images pour Debussy*); Bridget Boland, playwright, scriptwriter (the Dickinson Gaslight, the Vidor *War and Peace*); Cary Odell, art director (*Cover Girl*, *7 Days in May*); Abraham Sofaer, Anglo-Indian actor, 'God' in *A Matter of Life and Death*; Colleen Moore, sparkling silent comedienne; Suzanne Gauthier, successively Lillian Gish's baby in *The Wind*, a member of *Our Gang* and private secretary to Alfred Hitchcock for 23 years.

FEBRUARY: Marcel Bozzuffi, actor specialising in continental villainy; Emeric Pressburger; Allan Cuthbertson, the epitome of smarmy condescension in *Room at the Top*, etc; Nat Cohen, executive, m.d. of Anglo-Amalgamated, Anglo-EMI and other companies; Frederick Loewe, composer; Jay Leyda, critic and historian of Soviet cinema; Sidney Harmon, writer (*Talk of the Town*), then partner with Philip Yordan in Security Pictures.

MARCH: Joe Besser, a Stooge; Lois Wilson, leading lady of silents (*The Covered Wagon*, the Valentino *Monsieur Beaucaire*); Beatriz Guido, scriptwriter widow of Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson; Divine, humorous grotesque; DeWitt Bodeen, scriptwriter (*Curse of the Cat People*) turned Hollywood chronicler; John C. Holmes, spectacularly equipped porno superstar; Steno, prolific writer/director, mainly of comedies; Olive Carey, widow of Harry and long-term member of the Ford repertory company; Paul Kohner, celebrated Holly-

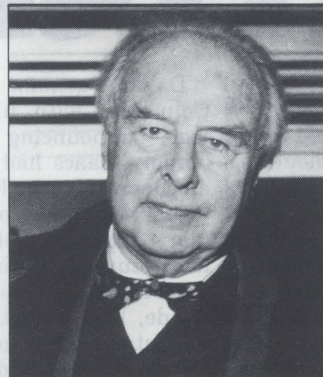
wood talent agent; Renato Salvatori, whose ox-like appearance ensured a long career playing thick thugs (*I Soliti Ignoti*, *Rocco and His Brothers*); Maurice Blackburn, house composer at the National Film Board of Canada.

APRIL: Anthony Péliissier, director for the screen (*The History of Mr Polly*, *The Rocking Horse Winner*) but mainly for the stage; Alf Kjellin, actor in Sweden (*Hets*), director in America (TV segments ad nauseam); John Clements, staunch British prewar lead (*The Four Feathers*, *Things to Come*); Pierre Prévert; Albert S. Rogell, workhorse director of B-movies; Sheridan Gibney, scriptwriter (*I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *The Locket*); Jesse Lasky Jr, specialist in hokum, scripting much of later DeMille; Kenneth Williams, whose unique voice was used to best effect cinematically in Richard Williams' *Love Me, Love Me, Love Me*; Albert Fennell, producer for big screen (*Tunes of Glory*) and small (*The Avengers* series); I. A. L. Diamond, Billy Wilder's writer/collaborator from 1957 onwards.

MAY: Paolo Stoppa, character actor (*Miracle in Milan*, *The Leopard*); Andrew Cruickshank, burly character actor, star of TV's *Dr Finlay's Casebook*; Alberto Zavalla, Argentinian director of the 1930s and 40s; Paul Osborn, scriptwriter (*East of Eden*, *Wild River*); Daws Butler, the voice of Yogi Bear, Huckleberry Hound and similar creatures; George C. Pratt, curator of the International Museum of Photography at Eastman House; Greta Nissen, star of silents (*The Wanderer*, *Fazio*); Ella Raines, 40s femme fatale (*Phantom Lady*, *The Suspect*); Guy Glover, Canadian producer, one of Grierson's earliest recruits at the National Film Board.

JUNE: Raj Kapoor, Indian star (*Awara*, *Where the Ganges Flows*); Jacques Ledoux, since 1948 curator of the Royal Belgian Film Archives; Russell Harty, British television personality; Chuck Roberson, stuntman and minor heavy, shot down by countless Western heroes; Jean Boffety, lighting cameraman (*Au Coeur de la Vie*, *Thieves Like Us*); Kurt Raab, familiar face in the Fassbinder gallery.

JULY: Jimmy Edwards, bellowing British comedian (*3 Men in a Boat*, *Bottoms Up*); Aldo Tonti, versatile cameraman (*Ossessione*, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*); Milton Krims, scriptwriter (*Prince of Foxes*, *Tennessee's Partner*); Joshua Logan; Phil Monroe, animator at Warners, latterly promoted to director;



Trevor Howard, John Houseman, Ella Raines, Rouben Mamoulian with Jennie Lee.

Robert Ottaway, editor of *Picturegoer* weekly; Milton Krasner, whose camerawork enhanced many films by Lang, Mankiewicz, Minnelli; Duane Jones, black actor, the lead in *Night of the Living Dead*; Stuart Legg, documentarist; Douglas Hickox, director (*Theatre of Blood*, *Zulu Dawn*); Brigitte Horney, actress (*Abschied*, the von Baky *Munchhausen*); Raymond Stross, independent British producer with a penchant for 'controversial' subjects (*The Mark*, *The Leather Boys*).

AUGUST: Florence Eldridge, Broadway star, intermittently in Hollywood, usually appearing with husband Fredric March; Colin Higgins, writer (*Harold and Maude*) and director (*9 to 5*); Ralph Meeker, tough guy (*Kiss Me Deadly*, *Paths of Glory*); Wilfred Jackson, sequence director on many classic Disney cartoons; Alan Napier, supporting actor, a Hollywood Brit; Anne Ramsay, the awesome Momma in *Throw Momma From the Train*; Ronald Stein, composer for AIP horrors (various Cormans, *Dementia 13*); Victoria Shaw, 50s starlet (*Edge of Eternity*, *The Crimson Kimono*); Jack Sher, writer (*Paris Blues*) and lightweight director (*Four Girls in Town*); Gilbert Gil, prewar juvenile lead (*Pépé le Moko*, *Gribouille*); Jympson Harman, venerable critic who held forth for ages in the *London Evening News*; Milton Sperling, writer and independent producer, head of United States Pictures; Gunther von Fritsch, co-director of *Curse of the Cat People* but little else.

SEPTEMBER: Gerald Mast, American critic and theorist; Gert Fröbe, distinguished actor for German-speaking audiences, primarily *Goldfinger* for English-speaking ones; Harold Rosson, cameraman whose credits range from early von Sternberg (*The Docks of New York*) to late Hawks (*El Dorado*); Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, Brazilian director (*Macunaima*, *Guerra Conjugal*); Stephen Grimes, designer of many Huston films; Roy Kinnear, pudgy character actor (*Sparrows Can't Sing*, *Juggernaut*); Henry Koster, director chiefly of conventional musicals, including half a dozen with Deanna Durbin; Christine Norden, blonde hussey of post-war British films.

OCTOBER: Lucien Ballard, cameraman, equally adept in black and white (*The Killing*) and colour (*The Wild Bunch*); Bonita Granville, child actress, malign (*These Three*) or cute (the *Nancy Drew* series); Melvin Frank, comedy writer/director, first in tandem with Norman Panama (*The Court Jester*) then solo (*A Touch of Class*); Charles Hawtrey, elfin member of the *Carry On* crew; T. Hee, storyman at Disney and UP; John Houseman.

NOVEMBER: George Folsey, veteran cinematographer, chiefly at MGM (*Thousands Cheer*, *Forbidden Planet*); Lukas Heller, scriptwriter, usually for Robert Aldrich (*Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*, *The Dirty Dozen*); Baroness Lee of Ashridge (Jennie Lee), Britain's first arts minister; actress Mona Washbourne.

Compiled by BOB BAKER

A N T H O N Y . S M I T H

changing channels

The idea struck me when my friends at the British Film Institute generously asked me to tell them what I would like to have as a leaving present. I thought for a day or two and realised that what I most coveted was really an event or opportunity rather than a physical object. I had noticed—it had been difficult to miss—that in the course of the previous few months a complicated convulsion had taken place among the small group of prominent and powerful individuals who are largely responsible for film and television as they are seen in Britain. They had all changed or exchanged jobs: as the great changes of the 1990s were being prepared in Whitehall, the upheaval had produced a new look to the row of figures at the top of the industry.

David Puttnam had returned from Columbia, with his tail between his legs, announcing a new Enigma; Jeremy Isaacs had gone off to manage an Opera House; Paul Fox, just a few years before he could have retired in glory and no doubt in riches from ITV, had returned in triumph to manage the Television Services of the BBC; Michael Grade, having just been announced as the future holder of that very job himself, had upped and offed to Channel 4. All of them were alive and well but working at different desks, and all of them were now confronting serious new problems affecting the survival of an institution. Rather than resting on an abundance of available laurels, they had all chosen once again to work in a condition of jeopardy.

My farewell-to-the-media leaving event would be to interview each of them in turn, in public and at length. I would get them before the ink on their new contracts was dry, to talk about their previous jobs. It would be more enlightening than a ball at the Ritz and far less expensive. But only if they would all agree. A round robin and four telephone calls produced a positive answer. The *Guardian* laid on a lunch and gave a party to follow each interview. The *Listener* asked to publish long extracts from the resulting transcripts.

David Puttnam's interview produced the largest audience, with no tickets left for latecomers. He conceded that he had been wrong about Hollywood in several crucial respects; in particular about its propensity for conspiring against the

Enigma: David Puttnam, in an earlier NFT interview with Derek Malcolm.



unwanted outsider. The 'They' of Hollywood operated 'in a wholly economic environment'. 'They', I pointed out, had apparently just gone out of their way to rubbish him, rather virulently, in the pages of *Variety*. (I had been astonished that this supposedly independent journal of the entertainment industry had given itself over, unprecedentedly, to the one-sided pursuit of so naked an intro-industry vendetta.) He had been elbowed out; then he had been ill; it had been a rotten year and he had ended up rich but jobless. He was going to start Enigma all over again, but with new, partly Japanese money, and he had found a fresh determination to support British and European (especially East European) production.

Michael Grade had started work as Chief Executive of Channel 4 bounding with jokey enthusiasm, exuding managerial sincerity and determinedly declaring his support for the channel's famous 'remit'. He made clear a polite scepticism for the current Governors of the BBC, not in terms of their failure to act with proper independence but because they have been tending to emerge from a narrower band of social and political positions within British society than in the past, thereby depriving the Corporation of a really comprehensive debate on crucial issues. He wanted Channel 4's special relationship with ITV to be preserved as the only way of ensuring that the enterprise kept faith,

in the future multi-channel environment, with its founding ideals. (I agree, provided Channel 4 also remains editorially independent of ITV.)

Jeremy Isaacs gave the impression of one who had given himself over already and completely to his new task. Covent Garden is lucky to have all that energy concentrated upon its needs. His most memorable statement was his resounding defence of the audience as adults, as people who did not need to be protected against programmes which shocked or dismayed provided they were properly labelled in advance. It was a classic statement of all that this society had

'The television issue is now likely to do for culture what the miners' strike did for industry.'

learned about the presentation of culture to the mass audience of the 1960s and 70s. Isaacs had fought for three decades against the same creeping censoriousness which has now pretty well enveloped us again. The battles would now be different ones. There aren't many four-letter words in opera. At least Mrs Whitehouse didn't know about them yet.

Paul Fox had now become the elder statesman of the industry. He had worked everywhere from sport to news, from the studio floor to the boardroom. He knew why and how every part of our system had got to be the way it is. He didn't want it to be in a structural sense very different, not Channel 4, not the IBA, not the ITV companies, not the BBC. (I agree with all that.) It didn't need to be. Rival institutions could and did make 'sensible arrangements' about the showing of football, about enquiring into mishaps, about the mistakes which everyone makes from time to time. It was absurd to cast the IBA away when it had done a very good job of looking after the interests of the viewer.

Puttnam had ended up on a note of crisis, demanding the preservation of British public service broadcasting in flight from the 'wholly economic environment'. Paul Fox had listened to Michael Grade from the back of the hall and was ready to reply to some of what Grade had said. John Birt sat in the body of the hall and smiled as his name figured in various questions from the floor. It was as if they were all members of the same common room. The basics were not at issue. The differences had all been so thoroughly aired that they could be reviewed as if from a distance. They were a close harmony group. My problem was/is that I support the whole package of attitudes and beliefs, but am scared for their future political liability.

Left: Jokey enthusiasm, Michael Grade with Channel 4 Chairman Sir Richard Attenborough. Right: elder statesman, Paul Fox.



If I had been Mrs Thatcher listening to all four of them, I should have grimaced with the realisation that this was exactly how I thought they were. I should have wanted to shake them all until the last licence fee fell from their pockets, until they agreed to fight one another till breakfast, until the last preferential arrangement and gentlemen's agreement had been irrevocably shattered. But I am not Mrs Thatcher. I am a conservative and want the system we have, based on public service, and gradually augmented over the decades as new technologies come along. It's a sweet old-fashioned view, I know, but I can't help it. That's what I think. That's where I belong.

The television issue is now likely to do for culture what the miners' strike did for industry. Establish the new thinking. Make all that went before quickly come to seem slightly antique. The ideas in the 1988 White Paper on Broadcasting should be seen as an accelerator rather than a blueprint. Moreover, the whole information and entertainment sector is a lever as well as a barometer of prevailing taste. It will speed up the wider process of social change; it will make the new thinking into the pivot rather than one side of the seesaw of contemporary politics.

The problem of the BBC in the new context is not primarily one of mere survival. It will carry on, and with the licence fee, for as far ahead as we can

see. But as the cost of purchasing and even producing entertainment material begins to fall, it will come under increasing pressure to specialise into news, information and national events. Its early 1980s attempt to go into satellite and capture the high ground again as it had always done in the past, though foolhardy, may come in time to acquire the aura of a last stand. It could never have worked. Not politically. Not economically. But for the BBC to retain that crucial kind of cultural power, the power to decide which things to represent as normal and plausible to the mass of the audience, would have entailed dominating or sharing substantially in the new technologies and was therefore both essential and impossible. That particular game was up and in the new era the BBC's task is to try to make itself essential in a marketplace of which it is not officially a part.

Public service broadcasting entails using a form of social power outside the justifying rituals of the marketplace. All Britain's television has been held in a public service vice through the IBA or the Governors of the BBC. It fell off the perch once or twice in the 1960s as it wrestled with the problem of how to stay culturally ahead and politically aloof. It was thoroughly successful and it came in time to be seen to be the most powerful of the instruments of twentieth-century social democracy. It was indigenous but escapist. It was a

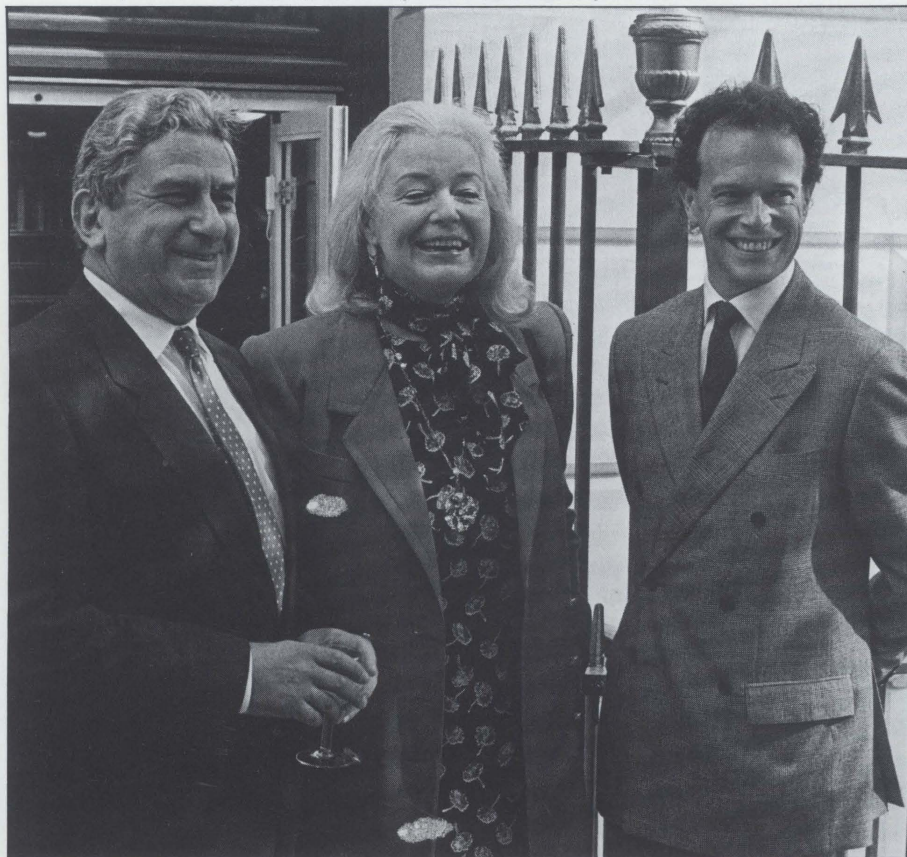
questioning influence but a conservative force. I am uncertain whether to use the 'was' or 'has been' mode for it is still there, looking for its way out of the garden and into the world.

Someone once said that the task of the historian was to protect people against the condescension of history. It is important now to keep remembering what the pursuit of the public service ideal actually did in society before the rush of the times quickly makes it seem merely a nannying and interfering way of organising the entertainment of a nation, an expensive fuddy-duddy luxury. History will not be kind to it for some time to come, any more than it is kind to the Commissioners of the nineteenth-century Poor Law, and for similar reasons. History these days is short with any group which functions as if it had a duty to do something for the good of others.

All that may seem unnecessarily despondent. There are and will be powerful continuities in the work of British television producers even if the main thrust of the system as such is competition for competition's sake, even if the values out of which the programmes spring and in which they are suffused are those of the market as goal rather than means. It is inconceivable for example that our television should cut off the long tradition of the single drama, even if it has to find some new formulae and some new justifying economics. It is inconceivable that the reporters will suddenly slough off the discourses of accuracy and balance which have influenced if not dominated their work for decades. British television will not either overnight or even over many years turn into American television. A raffish auction might take the place of the traditional IBA vaticanesque appointment of ITV franchise-holders. The BBC will struggle hard to avoid behaving as a cultural soup kitchen and might succeed, though under endless sniping pressure, in retaining its role as a public sector comprehensive provider of programmes.

The change lies in the fact that the television system, a crucial element of the whole now fading cultural settlement of the 1960s, will no longer exert social influence by right. The new radicalism brings to an end an established system for creating and monitoring the symbolic environment, as much as the Glorious Revolution of 1688 made impossible the divine right of the monarch, and the licensing of the press. The old method had performed rather better than nineteenth-century historians have led us to suppose. It died quickly, however, and a host of competing presses and competing opinions took its place. It entailed another way of looking at society. The old gang was gone. Pity, in a way. ■

Opera: Jeremy Isaacs, Dame Gwyneth Jones, Anthony Dowell. Photo: Donald Southern.



DISH - UP

THE PROSPECT FOR BRITAIN

'When the history books are written, we will be the third force, the third landmark in British television and beyond.' Such is the enthusiastic view of Anthony Simmonds-Gooding, chief executive of British Satellite Broadcasting. At the same time, Super Channel, Britain's first major involvement in the satellite broadcasting field, has been experiencing acute financial difficulties. The propaganda war between BSB and Rupert Murdoch, who is shortly to put his Sky Channel on to the new Astra satellite, produces conflicting claims about the efficacy of the different kinds of technology involved. And, meanwhile, the much vaunted and long-heralded 'cable revolution' seems to be stubbornly refusing to ignite. All in all, a confusing and contradictory picture, so that the moment seems opportune for looking at the various players on an increasingly muddled field.

At present, the majority of those in Britain who receive television programmes from satellite channels are doing so through the medium of cable. Satellite signals are beamed down to a central receiving dish, from which they are fed out to subscribers along the cable system. The main reason for this is that the current generation of satellites, such as Eutelsat and Intelsat, send out relatively low-powered signals which can be received only by large dishes, measuring from 1.8 to 5 metres in diameter. Such dishes are both unsightly and expensive. It is estimated that no more than about 6,000 premises in the United Kingdom possess the receiving equipment, most of these being businesses rather than private dwellings.

The current phase of the cabling-up of Britain goes back to the Hunt Report of 1982. This advocated the development of cable along private enterprise lines, supervised by a new 'light touch' body, the Cable Authority, which would award franchises but, unlike the IBA, have little say in programme content and no public service broadcasting obligations. Critics have accused the Authority of simply 'touting for business'; some are worried about its efforts to persuade the government to lift restrictions which at present prevent non-EEC companies from holding majority stakes in UK cable operations. The Authority argues, on the other hand, that foreign (i.e. American) investment is badly needed to boost an industry caught up in a vicious circle in which lack of investment leads to low-quality programming, which in turn contributes

to low subscription levels, hardly an attractive prospect for advertisers.

Certainly the current situation is not a particularly healthy one. According to the most recent figures published by the

JULIAN PETLEY

Authority, the number of homes connected to cable at the beginning of July 1988 stood at 265,085, an increase of 8,500 over the previous quarter and of 57,000 over the year. At present eleven broadband franchises are operational, although none of these is fully completed in the sense that it covers the whole

of the franchise area. Thirteen more franchises have been awarded and are at various stages of planning; and the Authority has invited applications for a further fourteen. Subscribers span both the lower and middle income groups, although there may seem to be a perceptible bias in allocations to the cash-rich South. BBC1 and ITV top the viewing figures, but stations such as Sky, Super Channel, Bravo and the Children's Channel win out over BBC2 and Channel 4. Ten British programme channels are currently available to cable systems throughout the UK, and most

of the broadband systems also carry channels distributed by satellite from overseas, such



Photo: British Telecommunications plc.

as the French TV5, Italy's RAI, Moskva, and the American Worldnet and CNN.

In some areas there are also local channels of text information, community access channels and ethnic minority ones, such as the Arabic Channel which is available on Westminster Cable. Subscriptions average out at about £16 per month. For example, Westminster charges £9.95 a month for rental of the equipment, which will bring the subscriber the four conventional broadcasting channels. The other channels cost extra—from £3.95 to £10.95 a month. But the number of people who choose to subscribe to cable, as opposed to the number of houses simply passed by cable, is still very low. Not many potential subscribers seem anxious to turn into actual ones. And when one considers that it costs £30m to pass every 100,000 British homes with cable, it becomes clear that the dream of cabling up the UK could turn into something of a financial nightmare.

The Cable Authority hopes that the publicity generated by the imminent launch of Astra and BSB will raise public awareness about the services on offer outside the conventional broadcasting structures. If people decide to buy the new smaller and cheaper satellite dishes, however, rather than become connected to cable, it will hardly be to the latter's benefit. Before coming to Astra and BSB, though, it might be worth looking at the short and sad history (so far, at least) of Super Channel.

Super Channel was launched in January 1987, with the blessing of Mrs Thatcher and the backing of fourteen ITV companies and Richard Branson's Virgin. The idea was to spread the 'best of British' broadcasting across Europe. But this soon hit a snag, when Equity refused to sanction BBC and ITV repeats on the channel, and there then followed a damaging war over advertising between Super Channel and Rupert Murdoch's Sky, which had previously had

the pan-European scene to itself. In spite of this, and in spite of the Channel's determinedly populist and cheap programming, Sky had in fact lost about £40m over its first five years. In its first two years of existence, Super Channel has notched up some £60m in losses—in October 1988, ITN claimed that it had been offered the channel as salvage for £1.

As the ITV companies have become increasingly concerned about their own terrestrial prospects, and have begun to gear themselves for a possible franchise auction in 1992, so they have dropped out of Super Channel in increasing numbers. And yet, in spite of losses recently running at £1m a month, the story of Super Channel is by no means an entirely negative one. In its first year of operation it attracted about £6m in advertising revenue, and the latest figures from PETAR (Pan-European Television Audience Research) show a steady growth in audience figures. Indeed, with a weekly reach of more than 9.5m viewers, the company claims that it now delivers more viewers per month than any ITV company outside London. The survey shows that Sky has an even bigger audience, at 10.7m, and this also has been growing. Sky, moreover, has the larger potential audience, at 27m compared to Super Channel's 23.5m.

The Super Channel story so far demonstrates all too clearly that in satellite broadcasting it is possible to reach large numbers of people and attract a respectable amount of advertising revenue and still make a heavy loss—at least in the early years of business. This is an area in which only the highly capitalised can possibly hope to survive. But another lesson may be that there is not really a place for a British-based satellite operation with pan-European aspirations. As one satellite TV executive put it, 'An English-language channel is the last resort for the European viewer. People may speak English in the office, but when they get home they

want to relax by watching programmes in their own language.'

All the same, Super Channel's immediate future seems assured, now that BETA Television, owner of the video music business which operates a 24-hour music network in Italy, has purchased a controlling interest from twelve of the ITV companies which set up the channel. BETA paid a token £1 for its 55 per cent stake and has taken over several million of the channel's debts. Virgin, which has not contributed any new money, retains its 45 per cent holding.

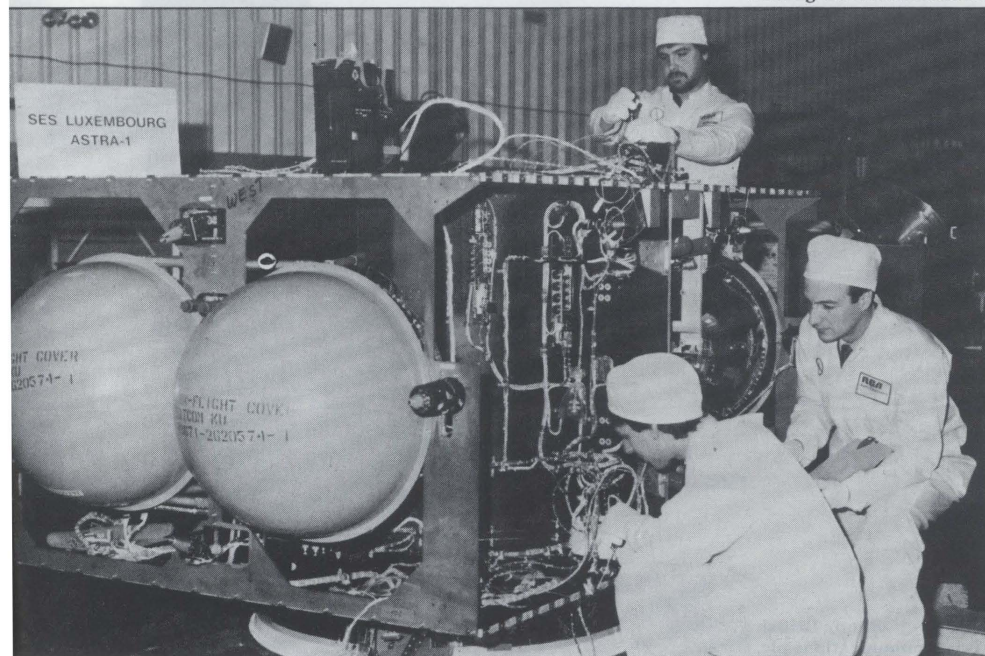
Meanwhile, more channels are on the way via the Astra satellite. Astra is owned by the Société Européenne des Satellites, which is backed by a powerful consortium of European bankers, and has the capacity to carry sixteen channels. Astra also hopes to attract Robert Maxwell's Premiere, Home Video and MTV channels, the Children's Channel, the Arts Channel and Ted Turner's Cable News Network.

On 26 October 1988, W.H. Smith announced that it was putting its Screensport and Lifestyle channels on to Astra in a £40m deal. These are already available on cable, but now Screensport will be expanded into a 24-hour service broadcasting in French and English (with the future possibility of simultaneous soundtracks in German and Spanish), while Lifestyle will be extended to include evening programming and will also feature a three-month trial of a television shopping service in conjunction with the direct response company Kaleidoscope Scotcade. The channels will be financed by a mixture of advertising and subscription and will begin broadcasting using the existing television standard, PAL. In autumn 1989, however, they will move to the more advanced D-MAC standard. Viewers will have to be careful to buy reception equipment which can be adapted to take both types of signal, which it is estimated will cost about £300.

Originally it was thought that W.H. Smith, Murdoch and Maxwell would launch a combined package of channels to compete with BSB. First Murdoch decided to go it alone on Astra; then a split developed between W.H. Smith and Maxwell, mainly over the approach to marketing their channels. Maxwell, who had set up a joint venture company with British Telecom to market their three channels, wanted a large-scale company which would sell a package of channels to the consumer for a single subscription, returning half the revenues to the channels and keeping the rest. W.H. Smith, on the other hand, wanted a low-key marketing company selling the channels for a fee of around 15 per cent.

Murdoch, meanwhile, hopes to begin broadcasting in March 1989, several months ahead of the rival BSB, with four channels on Astra. Apart from Sky, which is an all-entertainment channel, there will be separate channels devoted to news and information, sport and films. The sports channel will be

Testing the Astra satellite.



produced by the EBU (in which the BBC has a stake), but the news will be largely an in-house affair. This has aroused fears of *Sun*-style 'tabloid news', although the channel will also be relying on agencies such as Visnews and will be getting United States news from the Murdoch-owned Fox TV news bureau. The film channel will obviously make use of the huge 20th Century Fox archive, and this has already led to suggestions from ITV and the BBC that Fox is refusing to sell them certain titles in readiness for the launch of Astra.

Contrary to the original plan, the film channel will have to be paid for by subscription. The main reason for this change is pressure from film producers worried about lost revenues. A survey commissioned by BSB and published in October 1988 suggested that a single unscrambled film channel could cost between £23m and £59m a year in lost royalties. The report concluded that the signal overspill from such a channel would 'impair the studios' ability to license the film for other markets' and 'cause immense damage' to Hollywood's revenue from Europe. Thus Murdoch would either be forced to scramble the movie channel's signal or could be denied product by the major studios.

As mentioned earlier, it will be possible to receive the Astra channels through home-based satellite dishes, which are smaller and cheaper than existing models. The same goes for BSB, although the systems will not use the same technology. Each side claims that its equipment is superior, and the scene looks set for a rerun of the VHS/Beta struggle for supremacy. Murdoch will use the PAL signal transmission format. In order to produce dishes cheaply, he has gone into partnership with Alan Sugar's Amstrad (originally part of the BSB consortium), which has undertaken to make one million dishes a year at a cost of between £199 and £250 (depending on whether or not a decoder is required). Later, an additional D-MAC decoder is promised for an extra £80 or so.

Like Sky, the rest of Rupert Murdoch's channels are unashamedly aimed at a mass market. In particular they are aimed at the British mass market, although they will be able to be picked up elsewhere in Europe. The idea is to attract the largest possible number of viewers in a short time and to attract advertisers on the basis of high ratings, with a view to trying to undercut the ITV rate card. To this end, the price of programming is to be kept down, which means employing small numbers of full-time staff and relying to a considerable extent on bought-in material. The former has already led to de-recognition of the NUJ and the ACTT.

Nevertheless, by anyone's standards the operation is hardly a cheap one. It has been estimated that Murdoch, who is already sustaining losses at Sky and Fox, will need at least £160m in the first year of operations for renting the satellite space, advertising the service

and paying for the programmes. At the moment he is spending £15m on a centre at Osterley, from which the channels will be fed to his docklands teleports; there they will be up-linked to the Astra satellite itself. It is also estimated that there will be a need for investment of some £700m over the next few years before the operation breaks even, a forecast which the histories of Sky and Super Channel (so far) would seem to bear out.

British Satellite Broadcasting was allotted a fifteen-year franchise by the IBA in 1986, after a lengthy process of advertising and selection. (This will never happen again, as it seems highly likely that the IBA will be replaced by a body with a considerably lighter regulatory touch.) The satellite will be launched from Cape Canaveral in August 1989 and will be owned by BSB (a difference from the Murdoch operation, which is simply renting space on Astra). There will be four channels. The Movie Channel will cost £10 a month subscription; the rest will be funded by advertising. These are Zig Zag (children), Galaxy (entertainment) and the news channel Now, which is provided by a consortium led by ITN. Amid a certain amount of controversy, mainly over the wisdom of the involvement of a daily newspaper, Now recently awarded an £8m contract for 35 hours of women's programmes per week to a consortium made up of the *Daily Mail*, Yorkshire Television, Ann Diamond and Mike Hollingsworth of Music Box.

British Satellite Broadcasting will employ the new D-MAC technology, which is considerably younger than the thirty-year-old PAL system. Its supporters claim that it will deliver a better picture, and furthermore that it will eventually be able to provide high definition television. The present estimate is that the receiving dish—a small square aerial known as a 'squarial'—will cost about £250.

The founder investors in BSB are

Granada, Anglia, Virgin, Pearson (in which Murdoch has a stake), Reed International, Next and the Bond Corporation. Again, the sums involved are vast: £225m for the initial launch, £50m for the marketing campaign and £130m for programming in the first year. There is already talk of the company being floated on the stock market in 1989 in order to raise a further £400m. Yet, in spite of these massive sums, it can be shown that both BSB and Murdoch are spending rather lightly on actual programme-making, by comparison with the conventional broadcasting organisations. As Richard Brooks has pointed out (*Television Week*, 6 October 1988 and the *Observer*, 16 October 1988), the BBC spends about £550m a year on national programmes for its two channels, while ITV and Channel 4 together spend about £565m. Against this, BSB's £130m and Murdoch's £100m seem pretty slim.

Drama, the most expensive form of programming, costs ITV and the BBC between £350,000 and £400,000 an hour, light entertainment about £137,000 an hour, news £50,000 and sport £25,000. Channel 4 started off with costs averaging out at about £35,000 an hour, although this has now risen to £45,000. And yet programmes from BSB and Murdoch, it is estimated, will cost some £5,000 an hour. Even with lower staffing levels and strand programming (several consecutive hours of the same type of material), it is hard to see how they are going to produce much high quality, original material at these rates. More optimistically, however, it's worth noting that BSB has already entered into a deal with David Puttnam's Enigma Productions which will give the channel exclusive rights to the company's first six films, and that it has set aside £4m to secure twelve British or European theatrical releases at pre-production stage. The company also recently announced its first UK film investment: *The Rachel Papers*, based on Martin

The Rachel Papers: Director Damian Harris (centre) with Dexter Fletcher and Ione Skye.



Amis' novel and produced by Eric Fellner (producer of *Sid and Nancy*).

The question of programme finance brings us back to a problem already discussed in relation to the fate of cable in Britain. Will people be prepared to pay for a service which simply gives them more of the same—or, for that matter, programmes of a lower quality than they are used to? In the United States, the success of subscription channels such as HBO and ESPN indicates that viewers will pay for quality and for an increase in real choice; in Europe the available evidence seems to suggest that satellite and cable subscription channels are likely to do well only when the existing broadcasting systems are

weak and fail to deliver the goods. This could hardly be said to be the case in Britain—where, moreover, the films so central to the satellite channels' viewing figures are widely and cheaply available on video.

At present, it seems virtually impossible to forecast the likely take-up of the new channels. A MORI poll, and a Harris poll carried out for the *Observer*, showed that 70 per cent of those questioned said that they would not be prepared to pay anything at all for new channels; this conflicts, however, with research carried out for Murdoch and BSB, both of whom claim that a third of British households have shown interest in getting access to satellite channels at an early

opportunity. Whatever the case, Sky hopes to be received in some 2.5m homes by the end of its first year, while BSB has set itself a more modest target of 400,000. Both expect to see the first profits arrive after four years of operation; others predict that this will be a battle in which the winner will take all.

Satellite television is an issue which encourages magnified emotions on all sides. For some, it appears to offer a televisual Utopia of limitless viewing choice, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. For others, notably those working within the existing television structure, it seems to be the end of life as we know it. A headline in the Murdoch-owned *Today* exclaimed

DEFEENCE

A PROSPECT FOR EUROPE

Over the last few years most predictions of the future of television in Britain, and in Europe as a whole, have been suffused by a mood of appalled pessimism. Rabbits fatally fascinated by the glittering eyes of Murdoch and Berlusconi, the media pundits have foretold a tele-world of satellite-borne mid-Atlantic Euro-sludge, with chat show slithering after games show ineluctably downwards towards the lowest common denominator. Recent experiences in Italy and France in particular, and glimpses of the sleazy mediocrity of much US programming, have all fuelled such melancholy forebodings.

Fortunately, this may not be the only future on offer; and, if current initiatives from the European Commission's MEDIA Programme achieve any success, the outlook may not after all be so bleak. Set up as part of the EC's commitment to create a single European market by 1992, the MEDIA Programme (the acronym, cheating slightly, stands for *Mesures pour Encourager le Développement de l'Industrie de Production Audiovisuelle*) has so far generated twelve projects, each dealing with an aspect of Europe's flourishing, if beleaguered, film and video industries.

Ensuring that these national industries can remain viable, and competitive, in the brash new world of international forces is only part of the Programme's aim. Questions of cultural identity and cohesion are also crucial, as the Programme's tireless administrator, Holde Lhoest, points out. 'A European approach need not and should not weaken national or regional identity. Rather, by becoming conscious and formalising the deep consensus that exists among Europe's peoples, it should help to defend

national identities against the challenges that come from outside Europe.'

It was with the aim of tackling this particular aspect that one of the Programme's most interesting projects was

THERESA FITZGERALD

set up: the European Script Development Scheme (ESDS). After extensive research, and consultation with some 200 of Europe's leading independent producers, writers, lawyers, broadcasters (including the media barons) and other interested parties, the London-based International Institute of Communications presented its report, *Stories Come First: Television Fiction in Europe*, to the Commission last August.

The report, produced for the IIC by director/producer John Goldschmidt (*A Song for Europe*, *The Devil's Lieutenant*), is unusual in concentrating on the creative aspects of television, and on scriptwriting in particular. Drawing, among other things, on the almost unique experience of British independent producers and Channel 4, as well as the successes of various film funding bodies such as the UK's National Film Development Fund, the report concluded that the most effective way of supporting indigenous production would be at the scripting stage.

Pascal Philippe Volle (assistant director of the Television Fiction in Europe research project) explains: 'We realised that with the amount of money likely to be available, the only way to do anything significant at the European level was to help producers and writers at the development stage—where money is most difficult to raise and

where we can make it go further.'

The scheme's structure consists of a board of governors (representing broadcasters, independent producers and writers from each of the 12 member states of the EEC), an executive director and a script advisory group. The money, some £4.5m spread over three years and guaranteed by the EC, is expected to fund around 100 scripts, of which it's hoped some 20-25 will be produced.

Finance, though, will not be 100 per cent, as Volle outlines. 'We expect to pay an average of £12,000 per project, but the ceiling will be around £30,000. If a broadcaster comes to us, even if it's a Greek or Belgian without any funds, they won't be able to raise more than 50 per cent of the pre-production budget from the scheme. A poor independent producer, on the other hand, might get up to 80 per cent. It's the classic arrangement: if the project goes into production the fund must be reimbursed, plus a 50 per cent commission, on the first day of principal photography. That may sound a lot, but it would never represent more than about one per cent of the actual production budget, so it's a marginal figure for the broadcasters who fund the programme. If the script doesn't go into production, the money will effectively be written off.'

Submissions are expected from writer-producer pairs and not from the broadcasting companies. By the same token, subjects are expected to be those which broadcasters would not normally be inclined to develop themselves. 'We believe it's better,' continues Volle, 'to have original work—not only for artistic reasons but because adaptations have been up to now a major source of collaboration in Europe, and that will

'Freedom of the Sky Cuts 50 per cent off tv Ads.' The *Financial Times* covered the same story under the headline 'Murdoch Backs Down Over Free tv.' You pay your money and you take your choice. BSE's Anthony Simmonds-Gooding may proclaim that 'it's change, all change' and that the channel is at 'the centre of the sea change in British broadcasting', but it could equally well be argued that satellite is the greatest and most expensive media gamble of the closing stages of the century.

As the history of the film industry clearly demonstrates, technological innovations do not necessarily result in greater profitability, nor does the fact that new technological feats are feasible

and attainable mean that significant numbers of people actually desire them. The biggest tragedy for British television at the moment would be for current managements and programme-makers to assume that the satellite revolution is going to succeed, to assume that this will mean the ubiquity of 'tabloid television' and, in a rush to pre-empt the sky-borne competition and play it at its own game, to stampede the existing channels towards lowering their standards. The sight of sections of the British press sinking into the gutter during the last decade should serve as a warning to anyone thinking of embarking on this particularly slippery slope. □

continue. Again, we would prefer contemporary stories because we have seen so many things about historical events, and they, too, will continue without the scheme's help. We want to add a new strand of activity—we want new things on the screen.'

Emphasis on 'European' product and co-operation, however, has raised objections in some quarters that the scheme will promote bland, self-conscious Euro-fictions designed to appeal to all audiences and therefore satisfy no one. On the contrary, contends the report. 'Europe is plural and this diversity provides the main asset, the springboard for good fiction. The diversity of national cultures, of different local experiences and of different group behaviour, is a prime resource for successful European production. When one looks at the European fiction that is successful throughout Europe, one sees mostly very indigenous programmes. Unemployment, crime, cancer, homosexuality, women's place in the world—these subjects interest all Europeans.'

Pascal Volle emphasises that: 'We don't have any definition in mind of a "European" drama. We do think the stories will have to be interesting to broadcast companies in more than one country. But we don't want anything that looks like Esperanto—we don't want to equalise the differences of Europe but at the same time we don't want a mish-mash, a Euro-pudding. And we'd rather not see copies of American series—no Euro-Dallases. The most successful fiction in Europe is always very indigenous—things like *Heimat*, *L'Ami Maupassant*, *Edge of Darkness*—and this is what we want to see the scheme promote.'

What kinds of programmes eventually emerge from the scheme must ultimately, of course, depend largely on those running it, on the quality of the projects submitted—and on the unknown quantity of the broadcasters who are the eventual paymasters. Philosophical questions of 'European-ness', though, are not confined to creative matters, and other projects in the Programme have equally difficult, if more mundanely practical, problems to solve.

For the New Technologies Investment

Club, and the EUREKA project which has developed the 1,250-line High Definition Television/MAC system, there is the problem of whether Europe is whistling in the dark in the face of Sony's rival HDTV 1,125 standard. Creating another standard, it's argued, merely reduces the market, rather than making Europe competitive. Other investments, in computer software and other technical developments, may be more encouraging, less redolent of parochial flag-waving.

Inevitably, one of the stickiest problems for a unified European market is that of language. Within the EEC alone there are nine official languages, about as many regional ones, and an infinite variety of dialects. Although English predominates as far as international markets are concerned, domestic consumption requires a more flexible approach. Such considerations have led to the setting up of the European Fund for Multi-lingualism in the Audiovisual Industry, with a brief to develop subtitling, dubbing and other services for the Community.

Other projects include schemes to promote regional production, film animation and independent production marketing; the establishment of script-writing, production, management and technical courses; and the setting up of a co-operative low-budget film distribution network—all of which make sense in a European context, without raising questions of national identity or the forging of a new European sensibility. Co-ordinating the disparate experiences and expectations, though, with the aim of harmonising the best elements of each individual system, has been a daunting task, and how far it's been achieved has yet to be proved.

So far the MEDIA Programme has been mainly a lot of talking and a great deal of research. With the setting up of the schemes—still under-publicised—the project has moved into what Holde Lhoest describes as its experimental phase. By the end of 1989 the first fruits of the ESDs should be hitting our screens. And by 1992 we should know if there's such a thing as a truly European audiovisual culture; or whether we, too, prefer games shows and soft porn to *Heimat*—or even to *EastEnders*. ■

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PASSING GO

EUROPE'S MEDIA MOGULS PLAY MONOPOLY

'We will be masters in our own house,' fulminated Robert Maxwell before a capacity audience of European tv executives and journalists. 'We will not accept domination by the United States.' The occasion was the television industry's annual programme bazaar in Cannes, known in industry acronym jargon as MIP-TV, and Maxwell was calling for a ceiling of 50 per cent on the American programming which has dominated Europe's airwaves. His audience assumed that by 'we' Maxwell was referring to the European public. They were wrong.

Surf's up for Europe's media moguls. From bureaucrat-beset Brussels to priest-ridden Portugal, continental Europe is awash in a wave of free-market zealotry that has already swept the United States and Britain. And Maxwell—together with a handful of fellow media entrepreneurs—is keen on riding it right through to 1992. Prevailing winds from European authorities are pushing him along.

In the UK, the new White Paper on television places the rrv companies in the dead centre of the free market: the franchises will go to the auction block, where the highest bidders will be given free rein to operate without former public service obligations to educate and inform. On the Continent, the European Commission is engaged in writing the rules that will lay the foundation for unimpeded broadcasting across frontiers in the United Europe of 1992. Neither of these major policy documents effectively restricts concentration of ownership.

Public policy makers once generally agreed that the most efficient way to insure diversity of opinion is through diverse ownership of the channels of communication. Recently, however, the watchful eyes of the Thatcher government and the EC administrators have lost sight of such household matters. Instead, they have fixed on the distant horizon, where the advanced commercial development of the American and Japanese industries is perceived to be a bigger threat to European television than any cartel. For these legislators, the creation of a consolidated private audiovisual sector—even if it is dominated by a handful of powerful players—is of more immediate rele-

vance than the question of how television can best respond to the needs of Europe's vast, disparate audiences.

The dash towards deregulation that has ensued is the most significant event yet in what has taken on the appearance of an informal game of Monopoly among friends, with the entire Continent serving as a playing board. Individual efforts by contestants to integrate activities on a national basis have already begun to bear fruit; with the consolidation of the European market in 1992, they will indeed be, as Robert Maxwell has it, masters in their own house.

WILLIAM FISHER

The names of the key players have become household words in their own countries, and as 1992 approaches they will have Europe-wide currency. Soccer team owner and former Labour MP Robert Maxwell, 65, and Australian-born American citizen Rupert Murdoch, 56, need no introduction to English-language readers. Less familiar, however, are Italy's Silvio Berlusconi and Germany's Leo Kirch.

From the Milan offices of his financial group Fininvest, Berlusconi, 51, supervises activities in communications, publishing, advertising, real estate, retailing, insurance and sports. His company is present in various forms throughout Europe, and in North Africa, Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, South America and the United States. A childhood friend of Italy's former Socialist prime minister Bettino Craxi, Berlusconi is, together with Maxwell, the Socialist lynch-pin of European telecommunications.

The reclusive Kirch, 61, has confined his activities principally to film and television through his Munich-based company Beta-Taurus. Like Murdoch, he has allied himself with the political right. Kirch's lawyer is a partner in a Bremen law firm with the country's foreign minister Hans-Dieter Genscher. One of his board members is a friend and confidant of Helmut Kohl. A former Kirch manager, who continues to advise him, now works in the West German Ministry of the Interior.

Customarily portrayed as 'larger-than-life', 'self-made' or 'visionary', these four men are merely the most colourful figures in question, embodying specific personal styles of doing business in European television. Still, they are obliged to jostle for space around the Monopoly board with such monochromatic corporate entities as the sprawling Compagnie luxembourgeoise de télédiffusion (CLT), presided over by former Luxembourg Prime Minister Gaston Thorn, or the German Bertelsmann group, the world's largest publishing concern.

These players have cultivated a thorny briar patch of cross-holdings that is too dense to peer through at one glance. Even a brief examination, however, reveals the same few tendrils throughout.

Robert Maxwell's broadcasting empire is a fiefdom beside those of Murdoch or Berlusconi. Still, in the UK alone, Maxwell owns 20 per cent of Central Television, 30 per cent of the movie channel Premiere and 50 per cent of MTV Europe (which is now shown in parts of continental Europe as well). In that last enterprise, he is partners with British Telecom. That partnership is strategic, for the now privately owned utility provides him with access to an unrivalled sales network.

Silvio Berlusconi controls three tv networks in Italy which are now linked by satellite across the country. This arrangement caused a legal imbroglio there, eluding as it did the letter of a law prohibiting a private nationwide network. Thus it was that in 1985 the Italian parliament adopted a provisional six-month decree, known as 'Berlusconi's Law', which legalised 'interconnected' broadcasting by private networks pending legislation. Nearly four years later, this interim measure shows no signs of disappearing.

In July 1988, the Italian parliament finally proposed new anti-trust measures, prohibiting newspaper publishers from operating commercial networks. Such a decree, however, was aimed not at Berlusconi, but rather at his only would-be rival, publisher Gianni Agnelli of the Fiat Group, who is now stymied in his own bid to create a national network. Inured to Berlusconi's

enduring presence, the Italian parliament has created a model of 'pluralism' that institutionalises the comfortable duopoly of a single public broadcaster, Italy's RAI, and a single private broadcaster, Berlusconi.

Leo Kirch's Beta-Taurus group has chosen a slower and more considered route toward national hegemony. Unlike his counterparts, who have invested in broadcast facilities and other non-media properties from the start, Kirch has built his power base by systematically gaining a stranglehold on German rights to 15,000 feature films (including three-quarters of *Variety's* all-time top 20) and 50,000 hours of programming. That position requires his national rivals to deal with him if they wish to broadcast any of the top titles in his library. In protest, the public network ARD has refused to do business with Kirch.

Having acquired effective control of the lion's share of 'programming software', Kirch has now begun to seek control of its channels of distribution: in the last two years he has gained control of a (soon-to-be) nationwide pay-TV channel, Teleclub. In 1987, by means which remain unclear, Kirch snatched what could be the grand prize in German broadcasting: the private network SAT 1. SAT 1 had been losing money since it entered service, with 1987 losses estimated at \$60m.

But under Kirch's stewardship things should look up: he will be his own best customer, broadcasting programming which he has produced or to which he holds the rights, creating what is a textbook example of a vertically integrated monopoly.

Together with his holdings in the USA and Australia, Rupert Murdoch's News International Corporation owns 90 per cent of the trans-European satellite-to-cable service Sky Channel, and 10 per cent of the movie channel Premiere—together, indeed, with Robert Maxwell. According to News International's 1987 annual report, Murdoch even owns a stake in Super Channel, Sky Channel's only current rival.

Buying into the competition has increasingly become a tactic that Murdoch uses to hedge his bets in the costly broadcasting business. Murdoch has created three new channels—featuring sports, movies and news—which, together with Sky Channel itself, will be broadcast over the private satellite ASTRA. The costs of his plans for ASTRA are astronomical; access to the satellite alone will cost him \$14 million a year. Murdoch also faces a potent rival in British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB),

owned by a consortium which brings together some of the most powerful figures in European business and communications. Murdoch sleeps at night, however, knowing that he is himself a shareholder in BSB (through his stake

in the Pearson-*Financial Times* group, a founding member of the BSB consortium).

With a solid footing on their home turf, the foursome has begun to march in step across the Continent. Maxwell has been building his beachhead on the mainland in France, where—during the Mitterrand Socialist years—he has garnered among other spoils a 12.5 per cent share in the country's number one private network TF1. He has also picked up a stake in the private satellite Canal 10, which serves Spain. Sallying forth from his Italian citadel in 1985, Berlusconi also made his first move into France, where he acquired a share in the private network La Cinq (thanks to Mitterrand's intervention) and in 1987 into Germany, where he took a stake in the network Tele 5.

These holdings put Maxwell, Berlusconi and Kirch at odds as rivals on the Continent. These rivals are, however, brought together again—along with French financier Jérôme Seydoux—in the European Production Consortium, a group created to produce programmes which each of the partners may then broadcast in his respective territory. This mighty coalition was also fashioned by the French Socialist government, which wished to have a powerful private group at the helm of its national satellite broadcasting scheme.

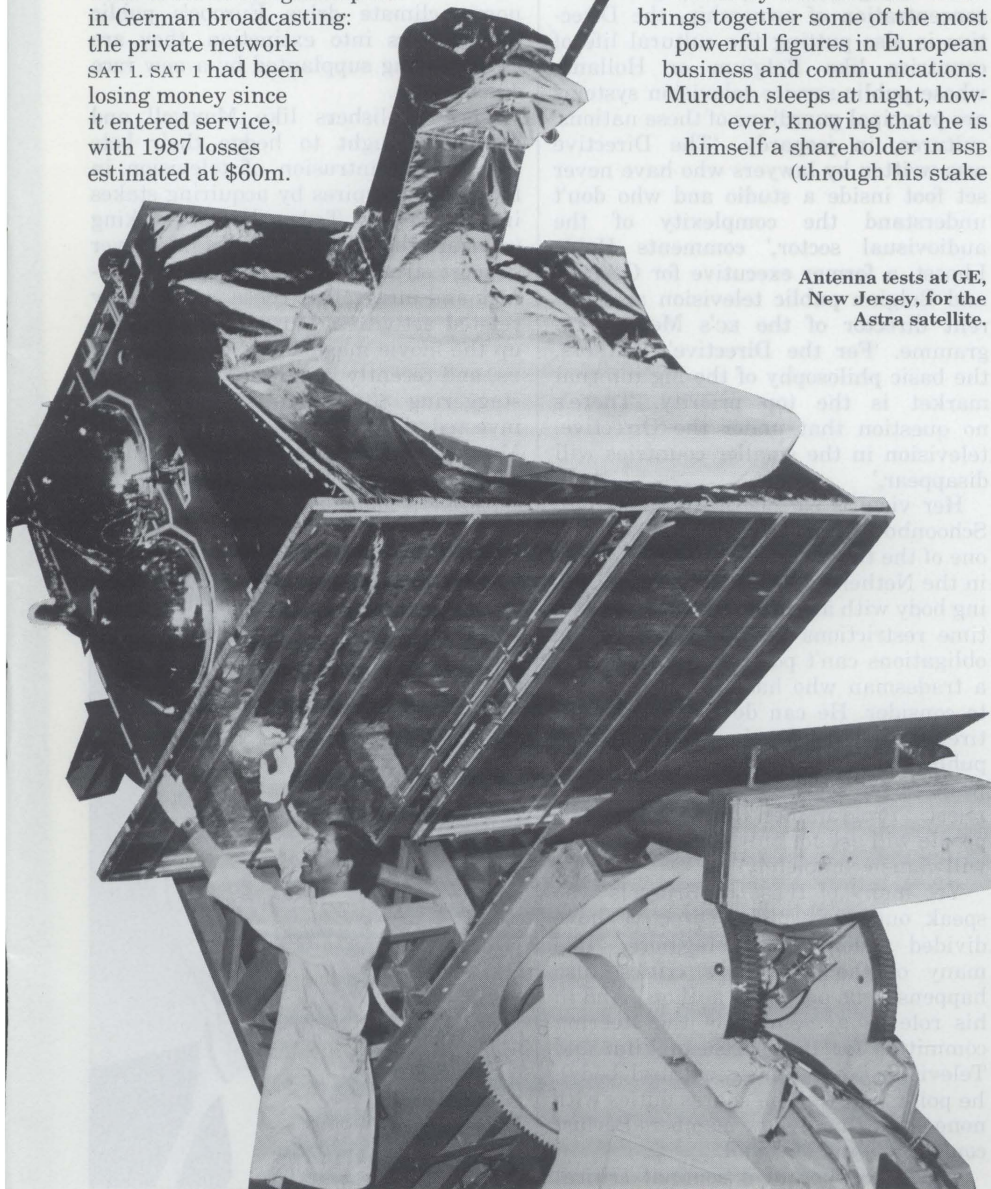
The constitution of this consortium—which has remained dormant for some time because of in-fighting among its members—is unique since it unites all the principal 'rivals' in European broadcasting.

In France, consortium-partner Maxwell, a shareholder in TF1, competes with consortium-partner Berlusconi, a shareholder in La Cinq. Through his stake in La Cinq, Berlusconi is associated with fellow La Cinq shareholder and consortium-partner Jérôme Seydoux—who, as it happens, is a partner, together with Murdoch, in BSB. Most recently, Maxwell and Berlusconi have broached the idea of sharing a berth on the French national satellite which was launched in autumn 1988.

In Germany, consortium-partner Berlusconi, a shareholder in Tele 5, competes with consortium-partner Leo Kirch, owner of SAT 1 (the only two members of the European Production Consortium who have overcome differences and actually begun to co-produce films and television programmes). Covering his bets on all sides, Kirch has also joined forces with his other principal rival, the Bertelsmann group (shareholder in the competing West German network RTL Plus) to create a joint cable marketing organisation.

Another shareholder in RTL Plus is the Compagnie luxembourgeoise de télédiffusion—which is a partner with Maxwell in the Spanish satellite service Channel 10. And in the UK—where 'arch rivals' Maxwell and Murdoch are shareholders in the movie channel Premiere—Murdoch joined forces himself with Compagnie luxembourgeoise de télédiffusion in 1985 to create a joint

Antenna tests at GE, New Jersey, for the Astra satellite.



production venture called Media International.

In the absence of laws restricting ownership, the media moguls' fortunes have increased and multiplied. And where current regulation is at odds with their activities, they have taken the law into their own hands. Last year, as a way of getting around regulations that prohibit him from broadcasting live in Italy, Berlusconi began to transmit from a new facility located on Yugoslavia's Adriatic coast, from where he now offers live sporting events aimed at an Italian audience his company values at \$1.2 billion a year in advertising revenues. This tactic is also employed by Canal 10, in which Maxwell and the CLT are partners. Canal 10 serves Spanish viewers from, of all places, England—and by way of a company registered in Panama. By broadcasting from London, Canal 10 circumvents the stringent set of rules set down by the Spanish government to regulate the country's existing television channels.

Murdoch, it seems, has similar intentions for the UK. He is currently taking steps to establish a high-powered transmission facility on the Isle of Man which would be capable of reaching part of Scotland, North West England, Wales and Ireland. It would also avoid the cost and the regulations of doing the same from inside the UK. Murdoch has received the green light from the Manx authorities for his project, which could forever alter the way we think of this island, hitherto known mainly as an offshore tax haven and the home of a breed of tailless cat.

Meanwhile, back in Brussels, officials of the European Community are engaged in writing a so-called Directive that will lay the foundation for European broadcasting in 1992. Their goal: as Europe's borders open up, so too its airwaves.

The Directive is inspired by the Treaty of Rome, the EC canon which established a framework for the free circulation of goods and services within the European Community. That document, however, was conceived in 1959, long before the development of satellite or cable, and at a time when commercial TV did not exist in continental Europe. Using it as a guideline, the Directive's authors have come to interpret broadcasting as a service—rather like mail delivery—which must therefore be permitted to circulate freely among all EC member countries.

Given the unabashed free-market orientation of its authors, it is hardly surprising that the issue of ownership is not raised in the Directive. Indeed, the European Commission's competition authority, also involved in the writing of the Directive, maintains a staff of only seven attorneys to minister to the more than 1,500 mergers that take place in Europe each year.

'Frankly, it's useless trying to do battle,' says Mariano Maggiore, head of the audiovisual production division for the European Commission. 'There is



Robert Maxwell.

nothing that I would like to see more than an anti-trust clause in the Directive. However, I don't think that anyone has the strength to fight them. It's like fighting windmills.'

Some argue that by failing to limit concentration of ownership, the Directive is also putting the cultural life of countries like Belgium or Holland, whose public service television systems are principal guardians of these nations' cultures, in jeopardy. 'The Directive was written by lawyers who have never set foot inside a studio and who don't understand the complexity of the audiovisual sector,' comments Holde Lhoest, a former executive for German and Belgian public television and current director of the EC's Media Programme. 'For the Directive's authors, the basic philosophy of the big internal market is the top priority. There's no question that under the Directive, television in the smaller countries will disappear.'

Her view is corroborated by Richard Schoonhoven, media director for KRO-TV, one of the three leading public networks in the Netherlands. 'A public broadcasting body with all its legal, monetary and time restrictions and its programming obligations can't possibly compete with a tradesman who has only the market to consider. He can devote himself entirely to product for the widest possible public—to what most people will always want to see and the fewest people will reject. Programmes that only some people will ask for only some of the time will vanish completely.'

Yet many of those in Brussels who speak out against the Directive have divided allegiances. Maggiore, like many of the Directive's critics, also happens to be one of its authors. And in his role as a member of the steering committee for the European Film and Television Year (an EC cultural body), he points out that he shares duties with none other than fellow members Berlusconi, Kirch and Maxwell.

Lhoest, author of a seminal critical

investigation into the role of the multinationals in European television, was one of the founders of the so-called Investors Club for High Technology—a group which unites the EC's Media Programme with such industrial forces as Thompson, Philips and Maxwell Communications in an effort to build up Europe's audiovisual technical infrastructure. The group's president is Robert Maxwell's son Ian, whose appointment was finalised days after the patriarch Maxwell paid a visit to EC president Jacques Delors.

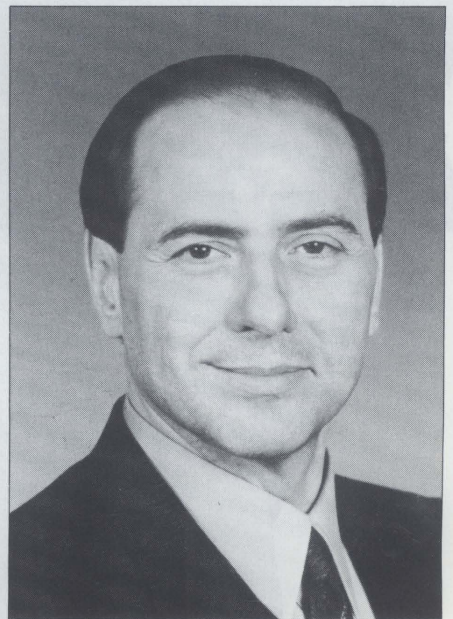
Another of the Directive's authors, Ulf Bruehann, in charge of questions relating to the market, proudly declares that Maxwell, Berlusconi and Kirch were consulted in the early stages of the Directive's formulation. More recently, he adds, his office has intervened on behalf of Berlusconi and Murdoch in Belgium and Holland respectively, where retransmission of Sky Channel and La Cinq's broadcasts was opposed by the national broadcasters.

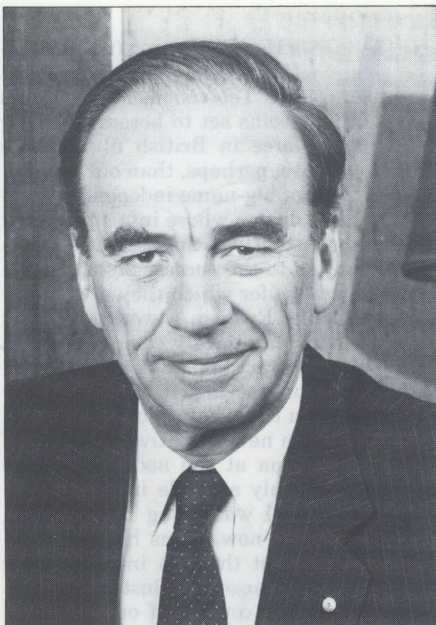
One wonders if, somewhere in the fine print of the Treaty of Rome, it isn't written that Europe's foxes must play a role in guarding her chickens.

As these changes in political and economic climate drive Europe's public broadcasters into extinction, they are swiftly being supplanted by a new race of leviathan.

Once publishers like Maxwell and Murdoch sought to hedge their bets against the intrusion of television in their print empires by acquiring stakes in broadcasting. Today they are seeking to insure their longevity by taking over support structures for their media holdings and integrating these strategically related activities. Murdoch has started up the movie magazine *Premiere* in the US, and recently bought *TV Guide* for a staggering \$3 billion. Berlusconi has invested in cinemas in Italy. Both Murdoch and Maxwell have begun to develop entertainment technology for consumers' home use.

Silvio Berlusconi.





Rupert Murdoch.

In the UK, where current ITV companies fear the loss of their franchises, they are scrambling to restructure. Three of Granada Television's biggest sidebar endeavours, for example, are motorway services, the hotel business and bingo. Indeed, the only ITV company to have actually 'diversified' into television has been Television South.

Over the last two years, Television South has developed into a global media force, active in the convention business (having bought out the organisation which runs the leading acronym media events like MIP-TV), a stand design and construction company to service it, and quality media trade magazines like *Television Business International* and *Cable and Satellite* to provide convention-goers with food for thought.

Most recently, Television South has allied itself with France's cash-rich network Canal Plus to buy into American and Australian television. They now control Mary Tyler Moore's MTM (which produces such shows as *Lou Grant*, *St Elsewhere* and *Hill Street Blues*) as well as having a strategic stake in Rupert Murdoch's own Northern Star Holdings, which runs Australia's Network 10. Overnight, tvs went from being a small regional ITV franchise-holder serving England's south coast to an international conglomerate with a \$310 million programme library and a worldwide presence.

Sources at Fininvest report that Silvio Berlusconi (who is already co-producing films and television programming with Television South), is now seeking access to an ITV franchise—as well as a share in these various industry support structures—through Television South. These developments make tvs' recent ad campaign in the UK national papers against the unwholesome effect of private enterprise on Italian television (featuring a British model alleged to be an Italian TV striptease starlet) seem all the more risible.

In addition to diversifying, audiovisual groups are allying themselves as

closely as possible with financial groups. 'We now occupy a position between that of a bank and a software company,' said one high-level official at Leo Kirch's Taurus Film, referring to the organisation's apparent *carte blanche* relationship with its 'house bank', the Deutsche Genossenschaft Bank, to which Kirch's organisation is reported to be DM 600 million in hock. 'What's DM 600 million today,' quipped the Kirch source, 'compared with the prospect of tomorrow controlling nearly all programming rights and their channels of distribution?'

In 1992, the twelve countries of the European Community will comprise a single market bigger than that of the US and Japan combined. The rate of increase in Europe's media revenues is already unequalled: Spanish television will expand by nearly 70 per cent before the end of the decade, France by nearly 30 per cent, Italy by 20 per cent. During the same period, American television is expected to grow by only 10 per cent.

But while the number of new media enterprises in Europe multiplies, the number of new proprietors patently does not. And while Europe's media business expands geometrically, European culture expands, as it were, only arithmetically. Jean-Paul Trefois of Belgium's public network RTBF doubts the common wisdom that deregulation creates a greater choice which necessarily benefits the consumer. 'It is true that, in spite of the new proliferation of channels, we public broadcasters will always exist with the same public service charter offering the same programmes—including those broadcasts of Sunday mass, those programmes for immigrants. But in the future, we will be forced to make do with an ever-shrinking audience share, probably less than 5 per cent in the end. In Belgium we have had a vital public sphere TV culture of a sort that is indispensable for the national and cultural identity of a small country.'

James Gatward (TVS).



Leo Kirch.

One of the greatest fears among public broadcasting executives like Trefois is that tomorrow's 'pan-European' television culture will try to give everything to everyone. Instead of aiming at an aggregate of diverse audiences as national public broadcasters have done, television will be obliged to address an imaginary 'majority' in the quest for ratings and advertisers. In the end, they fear, 'culture' will correspond less to the needs of these audiences than to the needs of business.

It is a curious tribute to the efficiency of the marketplace that the private broadcasters discussed here have succeeded in uniting Europe in their own way years in advance of official EC efforts. But before celebrating that fact, Europeans should take a close look at the evolution of American television, often cited by European broadcasting officials as a mature, model industry.

There, broadcasting developed along private lines from the start but with a parallel tradition of strong government regulation through the Federal Communications Commission. The latter created clear-cut regulations concerning concentration of ownership: concurrent holdings in both television and newspaper interests are outlawed; the integration of programme production and distribution is forbidden.

Free from such cares, Europe's media moguls make their annual pilgrimage to the French Riviera. There, in Cannes, among the palms, Television South plays host to the European television industry at MIP-TV. Lit by the flickering glow of countless TV screens, attentive journalists chronicle record levels of deal-making and Robert Maxwell's latest pronouncements. But the sense of it all eludes them. This acronym event—or what goes on behind it—is the preview of coming attractions for the 'unified' Europe of 1992. ■

The author would like to thank Colin Brown of 'Screen International' for the benefit of his expertise and advice.

FRAMED

mark Shivas

As Head of Drama (not to mention Series and Serials) at BBC Television, Mark Shivas seems set to become a major force in British films—more so, perhaps, than our handful of big-name independent producers whose influence, other than intermittently as an inspiration to us all, is limited to the success or reputation of the few films for which they are actually responsible. Even in a world distorted by hype, this can hardly compare with a three-year contract to hold the most promising set of purse strings in town.

There was a time, not so long ago, when the arrival of a new executive in charge of television drama at the BBC would have produced scarcely a ripple in the British film business—I was going to call it an industry, but it now seems hardly stranger to talk about the film industry than about, say, the museum industry. It is this very fact, in the context of our undoubtedly having a television industry, that underlies the potential strength of Shivas.

His announced plan to put more BBC money into independent theatrical features will make him and whoever he chooses to interpose between himself and aspirants to BBC patronage prime targets for finance-hungry producers. There are, as he points out, few other places to go, particularly with Channel 4 retreating from its position at the end of the rainbow, driven in part by the failure of many of its films to perform at the American box-office. Once again, the British aren't coming.

Although the enterprise of increasing the private sector's involvement in producing material for the BBC has an economic modishness, Shivas hardly conforms to the chilling image conjured up by *The Times*' description of him as 'the Government's ideal candidate for a top job in the corporation at a time when it is being told to introduce greater commercial discipline.' Certainly, he can be expected to operate with some prudence: the BBC will never be more than a minority partner, and the films will not be very expensive. There is no point, he says, in putting half a million pounds into a movie that costs twenty million, but some point in putting it into a movie that costs four.

In fact, by the criteria of the current Government, he seems quite an odd choice, with a track record as a practitioner rather than as an executive, akin to hiring a surgeon rather than a Brigadier or a man from Marks & Spencer to run a hospital. He is clearly glad to be at one remove from the business side, which will be handled by an Independents Unit. His delight as a producer was not in the aesthetics of the deal, but in having some input to the script and bringing together people who would collaborate successfully.

One may search in vain for a thematic thread running through his choice of projects to date. He dismisses the idea that there might be: 'You just go for the thing that turns up—it's very pragmatic.' But he does confess to a penchant for comic irony, and this, the expression of a wry sense of humour, is evident in many of his productions; it was already clear in his taste as a critic in the early 1960s, for instance liking Claude Chabrol's *Landru*, 'A tender film, a film of pastel beauty, a

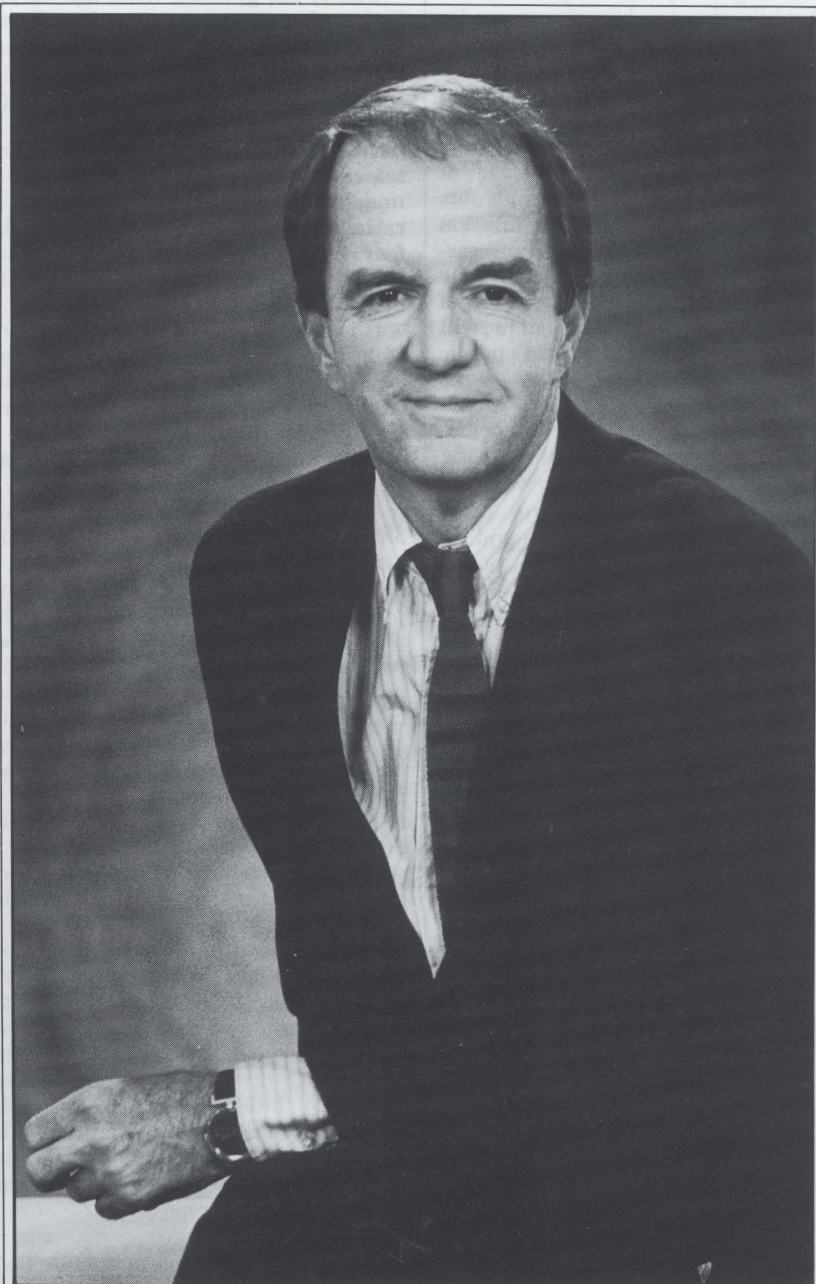


PHOTO SARAH GUILLE

film about a man of charm and delicacy who kills eleven women.'

That was in *Movie* in 1963. Before that, in our final term at Oxford, there had been *Oxford Opinion*, an undergraduate magazine that briefly, under the editorship of Geoffrey Cannon, developed ambitions way beyond its station. Writing about the films we liked, most of which were passing unnoticed by the critics of the time, and attacking the denizens of the British Film Institute, Shivas, Victor Perkins and I acquired enough notoriety to encourage us to start a magazine of our own.

There followed two years of intensive study in London's dear departed fleapits: Sirk at the Rex, Islington, Fuller at the Grand, Camberwell, Nicholas Ray at the Essoldo, Paddington, and more or less everything at the Tolmer, a converted church near Euston, now obliterated by an office block. In between, Shivas worked in the salt-mines of publishing, reading proofs of obscure technical publications for Pergamon Press, and we discovered that established magazine publishers were justifiably unattracted by the idea of a serious film journal.

So, with just enough capital for one issue and no knowledge of the economics of magazine publishing, we started *Movie* in 1962, and after three issues, gasping for cash, we found a backer, little knowing that he was about to run out of money. But for a few months, *Movie* had an office behind the stage at The Establishment nightclub, a secretary, and an editorial staff of Shivas and me. Then, with *Movie* temporarily in limbo, Shivas was able to use his law degree to get a job writing contracts in the story department of Granada Television. From there, he worked his way up to being producer and in July 1968 presenter of Granada's weekly *Cinema* programme. A rather nervous performer in front of the cameras, he was replaced after six months by the more relaxed and ingratiating Michael Parkinson.

At this point, he was the beneficiary of a clever piece of talent-spotting by Gerald Savory, who had gone from Granada to be Head of Drama at the BBC and hired him as a producer of plays. His arrival was attended by a massive piece of good fortune: his first assignment was *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, which he took over from another producer before the start of shooting. Although it does not figure among his favourite productions, it did provide instant track record: not just a huge success at home but exported to more countries than any other BBC drama.

Why, it seems obvious to ask, given *Movie*'s insistence on the importance of the director, did he opt to become a producer? 'Directors,' he says, 'need more application, strength and concentration than I usually have at my disposal. It's a very tough job, with questions every minute that you have to answer yes or no to. If you get enough of them right, you make quite a good end product. If you get the answers wrong too often, then the picture's no good.'

He stayed at the BBC for ten years, working mainly for BBC2 but in 1975 breaking through again to a mass audience and incidentally helping to add a stock phrase to many a journalist's

repertoire with *The Glittering Prizes*, which he produced from scripts by Frederic Raphael. The enormous output of these years included such staples as adaptations from Arnold Bennett and Evelyn Waugh but also an eclectic range of projects from plays about Wittgenstein to *84 Charing Cross Road*, *The Evacuees* (directed by Alan Parker from a script by Jack Rosenthal), two plays by Tom Stoppard and the still untransmitted *Censored Scenes from King Kong* by Howard Schumann. Some of these were shot on film rather than video—productions such as the three period thrillers directed by Clive Donner (one of the few British directors upon whom *Movie* has looked with favour) were seen in BBC terms as all-film plays. One of the first changes Shivas is making removes this semantic nicety: the Plays Department is becoming the Films Department.

In 1979, finding himself with nothing to do at the BBC, Shivas left to help set up Southern Pictures, a film-making subsidiary of Southern Television. Two years earlier, taking advantage of the fact that he was technically a freelance at the BBC, he had become one of the first to make a drama series for the Corporation as an independent producer. With the actor Peter Barkworth, the writer Brian Clark and the director Barry Davis, he set up a company with the off-the-peg name of Astramead to make *Telford's Change*, a ten-part series about a bank manager from an idea by Barkworth.

Astramead, which is still in existence, also ventured into the theatre, starting with Clark's *Can You Hear Me At The Back?*, again directed by Davis and starring Barkworth, which ran for nine months at the Piccadilly Theatre. Southern Pictures, however, did not survive; after two films and a series about Winston Churchill, what seemed like a safe financial umbrella was suddenly furled at the end of 1980 by the IBA decision not to renew Southern Television's franchise.

The 1980s have encompassed associations with Limehouse, a video studio in Docklands, which had a hard time filling enough of its capacity to survive, and with Jim Henson, of Muppets fame, for whom he has produced an Emmy-winning television pilot, *The Storyteller*, and a feature, *The Witches*, directed by Nicolas Roeg from a story by Roald Dahl and starring the improbable combination of Mai Zetterling and Rowan Atkinson. Shot last summer while Shivas was already working part-time at the BBC, the film has just finished post-production.

His other two features of the past few years exemplify his picture of just going for the thing that turns up. An encounter with Mamoun Hassan in the YMCA swimming pool on 6 January 1982 led to *Moonlighting*, directed by Jerzy Skolimowski, written and shot at breakneck speed and premiered, complete with subtitles, in Cannes on 20 May. Shivas does not look back with pleasure at working with Skolimowski.

A much happier experience was *A Private Function*, which was brought to him by Alan Bennett and Malcolm

Mowbray, its writer and director, and produced for George Harrison's Hand-Made Pictures. Taxed with the idea that it might be a throwback to the Ealing comedy, Shivas muses that it might be an anti-Ealing comedy—very black and (a most un-Ealing quality) gross.

'I liked there being nobody in the movie to like. The Michael Palin character was a wimp, and only fat old Richard Griffiths as the accountant was moderately sympathetic because he liked the pig and was crying as it was chopped up in the next room. Everyone else was completely foul or incontinent. *The Price* (an Irish terrorist kidnapping story he produced as a series through Astramead for Channel 4 in 1985) also has nobody in it to like. It's quite satisfying to do films which people go to where most of the characters are dislikeable. It probably means that they'll never do \$17 million in their first weekend...'

His lack of a penchant for the big, splashy, promotable product was fine when he was working mainly for BBC2 in the 70s. It remains to be seen how this will affect his choices, as he will also be backing movies for BBC1, which have to be of broader interest ('though God knows what defines that'). His own credits suggest a strong inclination to work in terms of projects that offer creative rewards rather than in the commercial coin of properties. The fastidiousness that seems to go into his selection of subjects does not, of course, make him infallible: his next series after *The Glittering Prizes* was a lugubrious six-parter called *Fathers and Families*, written by John Hopkins, and *The Borgias*, which he returned to the BBC to produce in 1981, was greeted by an outburst of derision in the press.

Frederic Raphael has opined in print that Shivas would never have made it in Hollywood, because he was not the type. Shivas, however, cites Arlene Donovan, who works with Robert Benton, as a Hollywood producer who is not the type. 'I suppose if I had been more courageous at an early age, I might have gone there, but I was having too good a time here at the BBC in the years between 1969 and 1979.' Always sceptical about the possibility of real independence for a film producer, he quotes John Houseman likening the BBC to MGM in the 1940s: lots of people sitting in small offices and hundreds of hours of material being made, which on the whole reaches the screen. 'Because of the large output, there is more flexibility and freedom to do things.'

It is an optimistic vision, particularly with the media increasingly menaced by the iron fist of governmental paranoia. If he can sustain it and use the Corporation's increasing role as a financier for independents in the same spirit, he will be doing well. Meanwhile, until he manages to delegate parts of his two jobs, he is having to cope with the rigours of watching *EastEnders* at seven in the morning in order to control an output of 180 hours of programming a year.

I A N C A M E R O N



Sigourney Weaver (right) in a Sundance production. Photos: John Schaefer.

SUNDANCE

During his time as head of Columbia Pictures, David Puttnam made a widely reported speech in which he praised Robert Redford for giving something back to the film industry—unlike other mega-buck stars such as Bill Murray. The comparison did not go down well with the Hollywood establishment. The handful of men who can award Redford or Murray or Rodney Dangerfield \$5m or more a picture would much rather commend themselves for their art collections and their occasional Oscar contenders than be reminded of their vulgarity, which is something Puttnam did regularly.

Although Puttnam and Redford share many of the same ideals of high quality commercial movie-making, Redford is a far cannier Hollywood operator. But as well as attending to his thriving career, as star, film-maker and businessman, Redford spends time and money on many liberal causes, of which the Sundance Institute is his top priority. 'He puts his money where his mouth is,' says Hollywood cinematographer Stephen Goldblatt. 'Many actors getting paid huge sums could take notice of what Redford has done with his money.'

Robert Redford has no wish to bite the hand that feeds him. He doesn't criticise the establishment. If anything,

his assumption is that the independent film community needs to benefit from the accumulated wisdom and expertise of Hollywood's finest craftsmen. Since 1981, Sundance has run a summer workshop for developing film-makers. It operates out of Redford's lucrative Utah ski resort and a crowded Burbank studio office, with back-up from his Wildwood production offices in New York.

ANNE THOMPSON

Over the years, the film programme has expanded to include the increasingly influential us Film Festival in Park City and the screenwriters' lab, both held in January; a biennial mini-us Film Festival in Tokyo; a producers' conference, and a Soviet and Latin American film-maker exchange initiative. In addition, Sundance supports a dance/film lab run by choreographer Michael Kidd; a film composers' lab and film music performance series; a playwrights' workshop and a brand new Children's Theatre under the direction of children's book author Maurice Sendak. The non-film programmes are self-

funding; earned income, which makes up a quarter of the Institute's annual budget, and the remaining revenue, raised from Sundance's board of directors and government and private grants and donations, all goes to the film programme.

'I don't support independents versus the studios,' Redford says. 'I support the personal vision of the film-maker. Initially, seven years ago, my feeling was that although independent films were very important, they just weren't good enough. A lot of them were mediocre and couldn't get into Hollywood. The idea of independent film held by many was of people raising clenched fists. There are other kinds of films of merit out there, by film-makers with a great deal of talent. Sundance initially focused on bringing people out of the regions, to create a new diversity and to develop their skills. We try not to get involved in production, except to help them get in touch with development people, producers and distributors. We concentrate on scripts and on developing various skills, like working with actors and cameras.'

During the early 1980s, a growing video-cassette market encouraged the production of independent films, many of them relentlessly inappropriate for

theatrical consumption. 'Redford's intention was to help the quality of these films, as long as they were going to get made,' says Thomas Wilhite, executive director of Sundance and a former Disney production executive. 'Hopefully the films that got made were stronger, particularly from the point of view of narrative. There's no doubt that Sundance attempted to fill a need not met by schools or by Hollywood. Students at USC or UCLA or the University of Iowa have equipment, a cast from the drama department, set builders, composers, a community of support in the college environment. When you leave college, you don't have that any more. Proven film-makers such as Alvin Sargent or Sydney Pollack have a professional environment of support. But there was nowhere in this country where someone who is not a student, someone from an alien field, whether a novelist or a commercial director, who wants to write scripts or direct features could find a body of support. It's too difficult trying to make films at weekends: people get beaten down trying to make a living while pursuing a career in movies. Our aim is to help artists in this middle ground between school and the professional establishment.'

Many films developed by Sundance have been produced and acquired for distribution, a large percentage partially funded by the Public Broadcasting Service's American Playhouse series, which shared Sundance's taste for regional, 'American' stories. Of the Playhouse productions developed by Sundance, Jill Godmilow's *Waiting for the Moon* (Skouras), starring Linda Hunt as Alice B. Toklas, was less representative than the rural dramas *Stacking* (SpectraFilm), with Megan Fallows as a farmer's daughter trying to save the family harvest; *Rachel River* (Cinecom), starring Pamela Reed as a frustrated smalltown radio commentator and single parent; and Jenny Bowen's adaptation of John Nichols' 1940s war-at-home drama *The Wizard of Loneliness* (Skouras). Such films have led critics to label Sundance projects as 'granola movies'.

Redford and his colleagues bristle at this description, and have recently begun to distance Sundance from its identification with American Playhouse. 'In the early years, when there were fewer distributors around, it was a likely alliance,' says Redford. 'We have made some mistakes. I've been encouraged by each year's refinement of the year before. I had no idea what would come of this. I was assured that it would be five years before we even got anything made. At first we concentrated on minority projects: it was a pleasant surprise when *El Norte* and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* came out of our first years. But many of the films we selected have never been made, either because they had a high risk factor or because there was too great a gap between the nobility of the idea and the film-



Robert Redford at the Sundance Institute.

maker's ability to pull it off. What gets seen is what gets made. If Mark Romanek's genre script *Crash* doesn't get made, no one knows it came through the programme. Distributors are less willing to take chances on unsafe material. And a lot of film-makers bypass us for their own reasons.'

Sensitive to this misconception of their collective taste, Redford, Thomas Wilhite and programme director Michelle Satter have been beating the bushes for less conspicuously 'humanist' material. 'People make labels,' says Wilhite. 'To some extent, the "humanist values" concept of Sundance began to seem confined to a narrow field. It can be almost any aspect of the human condition, whether pleasant, funny or frightening. Redford was at the top of the list wanting to blast open the confines of the Institute and the kind of films we support.'

Redford and Wilhite also re-examined Sundance's position in the industry, which is already served by the Ameri-

can Film Institute and the film schools. 'It's silly for us to be doing what other people are doing,' says Wilhite. Under its new mandate, Sundance now approaches more mature film-makers, not only from regional areas but from New York and Los Angeles, where most ambitious writers and directors gravitate. 'We want people in transition from one area of arts to another,' Wilhite adds, 'and increasingly people who have perhaps done one film before. In theory, they have made a movie and they have something to show, so they should have no trouble getting work. But in reality the second picture is often the hardest to get going, particularly if the first film is a bit raw, showing promise but unpolished. It's difficult for studio executives to judge potential.'

One independent film-maker close to the Institute suggests that Sundance would like one of these film-makers to deliver a hit. Screenwriter Tom Rickman, a long-time member of the selection committee, insists: 'We're not

Visitor David Puttnam (left).



looking for a \$100m gross. These low-budget projects are not chosen on commercial criteria. We are looking for talented film-makers and intriguing subject matter which takes chances.'

The US Film Festival, which Sundance took over in 1984, was originally conceived as a showcase for American independent films and the logical end point for Sundance projects. But the Park City festival has proved a magnet for attracting undiscovered talent. 'A number of Sundance films went through the cycle,' says festival director Tony Safford, 'but we didn't invite some, and we discovered that the festival is actually the beginning point for Sundance. We meet so many film-makers there, which expands our network of projects.'

Several of the June 1988 film lab participants were introduced at the festival, including documentary director Bill Morgan (*The Unheard Music*), Texas film-maker Andy Anderson (*Positive I.D.*) and New Yorker Bill Sherwood (*Parting Glances*). Safford hopes to signal Sundance's change of direction, which will be slow to reveal itself in the production process, by screening the most varied and exciting independent movies available: last winter popular competition entries included *Patti Rocks*, *Hairspray* and prize-winners *Heat and Sunlight* (fiction) and *Beirut* (documentary). At the 1987 festival, David Puttnam saw the independent entry *The Big Easy* and decided to acquire it for Columbia; and NBC's Brandon Tartikoff discussed co-productions with Pacific Arts video chief Mike Nesmith (*Tapeheads* was premiered the following year). Such networking serves to bring Hollywood and New York, majors and minors and established and emerging talent closer together.

Michelle Satter, Sundance's programme director, has also changed direction, with the script selection process shifting from original scripts towards adaptations from plays and novels. 'Until 1984,' she says, 'we depended on submissions. It wasn't the kind of search I do now.' Like her Hollywood development colleagues, Satter follows leads from a network of agents and contacts, including the ever-expanding Sundance insider group. This includes such frequent Sundance participants as producers Amy Robinson and Griffin Dunne (*After Hours*), Lewis Allen and Peter Newman (*The End of the Line*) and Peter McCarthy (*Tapeheads*).

Peter McCarthy is producing *A Matter of Degrees*, a comedy about a 1980s college student with a 1960s consciousness, which came to Sundance as a package with some private financing already in place. Director and script-writer Bill Morgan went through the June lab with his fellow writer and co-producer Randall Poster. With additional credibility from Sundance, plus a Panavision package worth \$45,000 (a gift to the Institute), they easily assembled the balance of the



Crew shoots director Bill Morgan, James Spader and Fisher Stevens.

financing and are now shooting the \$2m production on Rhode Island.

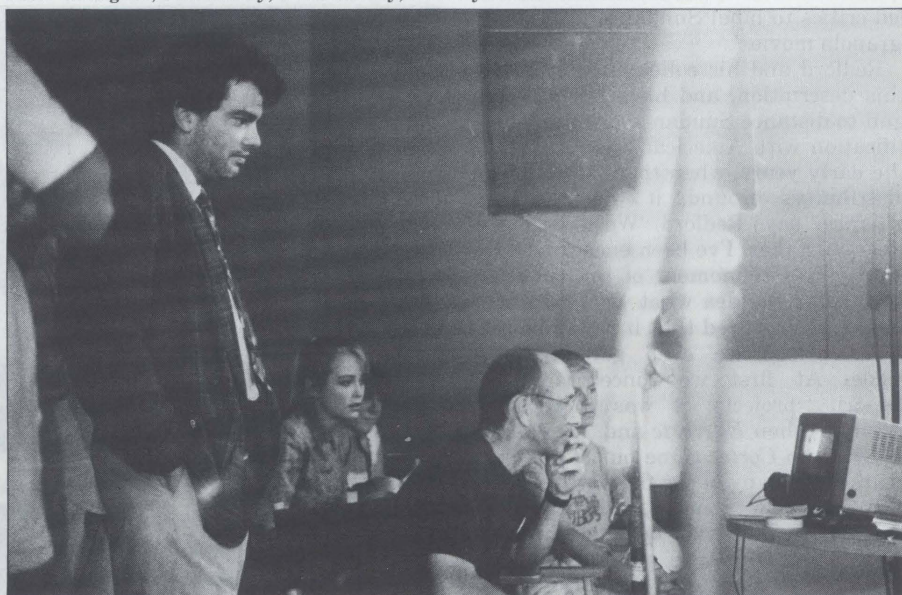
On the other hand, playwright Forrest Stone's *Home Fires Burning*, about two Harvard classmates who infiltrate a Ku Klux Klan sect, lacked a director and was assigned to directing fellow Jim Simpson. The theatre director enthusiastically shot a total of 14 scenes from two scripts and couldn't have cared less whether the projects got made or how polished his scenes were: 'I set up as many challenges as I could. My job actually is similar to my work in theatre: to storyboard, figure out how to get the dynamics going. The process of film is immediate: you have to make your choice and fiddle with it later in the editing room. Theatre is slower. I was afraid I would have to go out and get another MA. Now I don't have to go back to school.'

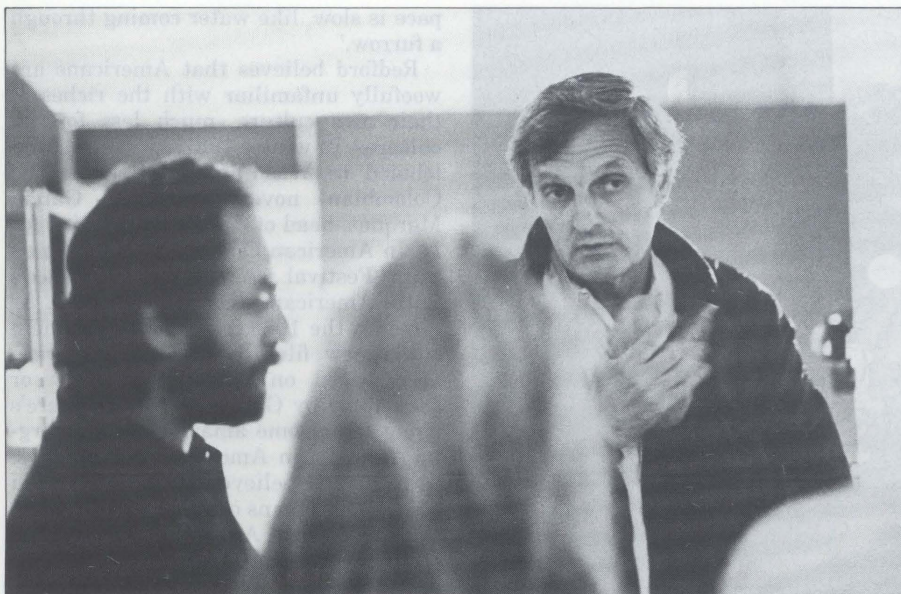
In 1988, an additional five projects went through full production. All writers and directors were encouraged to work on their scripts in advance and

be prepared to shoot their scenes when they arrived. Meanwhile Sundance casting directors Ellen Chenowith (Los Angeles) and Juliet Taylor (New York) lined up their ideal casts (subject to willingness and availability). For *Sounds Like This*, Bill Sherwood landed Peter Gallagher as the gay orchestra conductor who discovers that his only sexual encounter with a woman (Ann Magnusen) has resulted in a son with perfect pitch.

'You are there for three weeks,' Sherwood explains. 'You get new advisor types each week who hang out while you are shooting your video scenes. It was a very artificial, strange situation. It was kind of helpful and kind of scary. Paul Verhoeven had a very grouchy, aggressive personality; he could be hideously condescending. The actors were nervous around famous directors on the set like Paul Mazursky and Alan Alda. It was harder for them to fall on their faces. Karl Malden talked to me and the actors about film acting

Peter Gallagher, Pam Gidley, Reah Gavrey, Paul Ryan and Andrea Hoffman.





'Actors were nervous around famous directors like Alan Alda...'

techniques. I learned a lot from Stephen Goldblatt and the resource editors.'

'Certain film-makers were intimidated by the resource people,' Goldblatt agrees. 'We weren't directing their films; we were there to be of assistance if they wanted it. It's not a mechanical workshop. It's much more how people work in film, how they relate and how the story comes together visually.' Paul Mazursky comments: 'We'd sit in on rehearsals, readings, stagings and see finished work on video. Some directors were more experienced than others. You can't get too judgmental. I think what was best for them was learning about actors.'

Although many have described the June lab as an idyllic summer camp with a party atmosphere, everyone seems to have worked pretty hard. 'Wearying but not frustrating,' was how Stephen Goldblatt described it. The neophyte film-makers and their high-level actors were under most pressure, working with relatively inexperienced

crews. Predictably, the resource personnel had the easier time, since all they had to do was generously share their accumulated wisdom. 'You work a lot on instinct after twenty years,' Goldblatt says. 'You are forced to explain why you make certain choices. Teachers learn as much as those they teach.'

'It's a brief attempt to give something back if you can,' Paul Mazursky says. 'There is a basic feeling in this community of alienation. You don't really feel that you are working with people except on your own film. People are wandering around making deals, and one yearns for give and take. Sundance isn't so money-oriented, so review-oriented. For me, the group feeling was more important than anything else. I want to be a Communist—we all do on some level—and then go to Cap d'Antibes afterwards.'

The real test for the lab is what happens to its projects and film-makers when it's over. Writer-director Sherwood, for example, has abandoned

Sounds Like This in favour of some studio writing jobs. He lacks a producer and hasn't taken advantage of Michelle Satter's network of contacts. 'Ideally, Sundance becomes a partner helping to move the film forward into production,' says Satter. 'Finding a producer, director, casting, money, a distributor. Once development is done, it is ready to go into the world. I try to help bring in a producer as soon as possible, which makes my job easier. Each project needs a full-time commitment.'

Four projects, she says, are going into production this winter from the 1987 lab. They are film school graduate Malia Scotch Marmo's robust family comedy *Once Around*, starring Dustin Hoffman and Holly Hunter, produced by Robinson/Dunne and directed by Lasse Hallstrom for Cinecom; the opera film *Fall of the House of Usher*, to be directed by Michael Powell with a Philip Glass score for Cannon; Maurice Sendak's adaptation of his children's story *Very Far Away*, which he will co-direct with Carroll Ballard, produced by Tom Wilhite and Willard Scott; and TV writer Bob Comfort's romantic comedy *Dogfight*, with Michael Dinner directing for Cineplex Odeon.

Comfort's script had been quite dead when Michelle Satter read the ICM submission. 'He had never heard of Sundance,' she says, 'so we had to sell him on it. He wanted to make the transition to feature writing. He came to the January screenwriters' lab and got a lot out of it, much to his surprise. He doesn't admire many people in the film business. In June, we had Joan Micklin Silver direct one scene. He tends to overwrite dialogue. He needed to see the dinner scene, which was tough to make work. Directing fellow Dean Parisot also directed some scenes. Bob saw at least five scenes up. We cast Kevin Anderson, who will probably do the movie. I sent the script to a couple of people, but at the lab Bob connected with Peter Newman, who was there with another project. Peter and I talked about Michael Dinner, who seemed right.'

The Producers' Conference, organised by Tony Safford, began as the last weekend of the June lab, when the producers attached to projects conducted seminars for paying participants from all over the country. Last year the conference presented case studies on *The Wizard of Loneliness* and Film-Dallas' *Da*, as well as small-group discussions on development, production, finance and marketing/distribution. Again, a combination of information sharing and networking paid off for everyone involved. 'I'm trying to help one person with a really good script find a distributor,' says Bruce Feldman, a partner in a public relations firm. 'I'm not very powerful, but I'm better connected than they are.'

Successful as Sundance is at helping developing film-makers find their way,

William Devane on set at Sundance.





'Karl Malden talked about film acting techniques...'

they are still thrown out into the economic wilderness because Sundance draws the line at financing films. Many insist that this is the only way to retain its non-profit objectivity. But unlike Britain, with its assumption that television must be good for you, American television is no oasis for innovative film-making. The cable networks are producing some small-scale films of merit, but they are still very mainstream. There is no government financing body for small independent films. And PBS's American Playhouse and other programming is rigorously conservative. 'What we need is a PBS Tuesday Night at the Movies,' Sherwood says, 'where they would finance small-scale films, like Channel 4. No theme or umbrella movies. Just give film-makers money. That way it would work. This way everyone is scrounging around for private money. There is no tax credit any more for limited partnerships.'

'Channel 4 is so important because it actually finances films,' Goldblatt says.

'Kodak and Panavision are not in the charity business. Hollywood insists that every movie produce the revenues of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. There will not be an independent film movement in this country until there is independent financing.' Screenwriter Naomi Foner suggests that Sundance could help fill the gap. 'And encourage the existence of little quirky films that would never go in mainstream Hollywood. They're the equivalent of *Architectural Digest*: everything isn't *Life* or *Newsweek*. There isn't a place for those kinds of films or film-makers without it.'

'We are in script development,' insists Robert Redford. 'We are trying to support and develop skills, working with actors, heightening dramatic content, bringing Hollywood and the independents together, not separating them. What moves Hollywood is what moves any business: it's product. Bottom-line entertainment turns a profit. If a low-budget film comes along and makes a profit, there is tremendous support. The

pace is slow, like water coming through a furrow.'

Redford believes that Americans are woefully unfamiliar with the riches of their own culture, much less foreign cultures. In winter 1987, he successfully lobbied in Washington to enable the Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, head of Cuba's Foundation for Latin American Cinema, to visit the US Film Festival as part of Sundance's Latin American exchange initiative. As a result, the 1989 festival will premiere seven new films from Latin America, each based on an original story or screenplay by Garcia Marquez. 'There's going to be some amazing work emerging from Latin America,' Redford says. 'I've always believed that film was a marvellous means of cultural exchange.'

Several Latin American film-makers, including directors from Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, attended the June labs in 1987 and 88. And in 1988 Redford and a group of American film-makers visited Cuba to meet Fidel Castro, Garcia Marquez and the people at the Foundation. Scripts were translated into English for the American visitors, who conducted story conferences. Writer-director Tim Hunter says: 'I'd much rather read an unpolished not good Latin American script than an American one. Their clichés are more interesting to me than our clichés. They dealt with modern political intrigue, slave rebellions with modern day parallels, disaffected bourgeois mothers. I thought the material was pretty good and we were pretty good dealing with the material.'

Still in its infancy, Sundance has had influence around the world. After developing their script *Promised Land* at the 1984 workshop, American Oxford students Michael Hoffman and Rick Stevenson formed the Oxford Film Foundation, which sponsors a script contest and Sundance-style workshop for the winners, supported by the British film community and private donations. Sundance producer Jonathan Sanger and David Puttnam founded the Discovery Programme at Columbia, which gives money to non-film-school types to direct audition shorts. And film-maker Norman Jewison has been a powerful force behind the setting up of an innovative film school designed to seek out and develop Canadian talent.

There is no question that Robert Redford has given the American independent film community a great gift. Thanks to Sundance, there are more viable alternatives to the commercial sell-out. It remains to be seen how the maturing Institute will evolve, under a new executive director. After two years, Thomas Wilhite has left Sundance in order to produce his own films, although he will continue to be involved in the music programme and Sendak's Children's Theatre. Suzanne Weil, moving over from her post as vice-president of programming at PBS, takes charge at Sundance. ■

Robert Redford and Paul Mazursky.



In the cosmos

When the Florentine publishing house La Nuova Italia recently began issuing a series of monographs on the great names of the cinema, they brought in Ermanno Olmi at number 116. Before him, among the Renoirs, Bergmans and Eisensteins, were several Italian directors—Liliana Cavani, Marco Bellocchio, Mario Camerini—whose precedence might have raised an eyebrow here and there.

The relegation, for whatever reasons, is instructive. Olmi's admirers and detractors are fairly evenly divided, and his successive films continue to generate a controversy which has little to do with their strictly technical or artistic aspects. To the interested foreign observer of modern Italian cultural life, it often seems that Olmi's compatriots are more interested in his reluctance to toe

certain approved political or ideological lines than in his merits as a film-maker.

Enduring antipathy to him among the intellectual establishment in Italy has emerged most powerfully as a result of his unrepentant loyalty to Roman Catholicism, expressed at its clearest in

JONATHAN KEATES on Ermanno Olmi

E venne un uomo, a film based on the early career of Pope John XXIII. To those outside the historic Catholic heartlands, the notion of anticlericalism has a strangely old-fashioned ring to it, and the simple truth that it continues to inspire many

of the more fervently antagonistic reactions to works of art is sometimes hard to grasp.

The unrepentantly materialistic character of Italian life, the national obsession with style, appearance and the conspicuous display of personal wealth, embraces little in the way of spiritual dimensions: even Italian saints, like Francis of Assisi or Catherine of Siena, have a practical no-nonsense quality about them far removed from the gloomy mysticism or contemplative ecstasies of their French and Spanish counterparts. Thus the presence of Catholicism's power-base within such a culture, together with the papacy's historic exercise of political force and territorial ambition, curbed barely a century ago, have created a vast, often resentful scepticism among Italians regarding the



Long Live the Lady!
Marco Esposito.

presence and activities of the church in the community. Politics has sharpened the dividing line, with the majority of artists and academics remaining resolutely outside the fold. For a writer or director to declare a religious allegiance demands increasing courage: the term *credente*—believer—is all too often sneeringly applied, and that most volatile and articulate of Italian daily newspapers, *La Repubblica*, is never more savage than in its treatment of anything with a specifically Catholic slant to it.

Though few of Olmi's films have been explicitly religious in content, nobody taking stock of his overall achievement can ignore the profoundly Catholic elements of his work. The most obvious though scarcely the most appropriate parallels in the Italian cinema which spring to mind are those of Pasolini and Zeffirelli. The former's *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, originally appearing amid a volley of conservative criticism, based on what was known of the director's political allegiances and personal life, was accepted soon enough as one of the most dignified and sensitive screen treatments ever made of the life of Christ. The latter's kitsch version of the same subject, deliberately fudging such moments as the appearance of the Angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin (in the Zeffirellian Annunciation Mary is simply frightened by what seems to be a small local hurricane which has somehow got in through the window), nevertheless earned ecclesiastical approval, presumably because of its maker's stridently enunciated religiosity. That Zeffirelli should have weighed in loudly on the fracas attending Italian screenings of *The Last Temptation of Christ* need come as no surprise.

Olmi, though never feeling the need to trumpet his faith, has not abandoned

the position for which Italian critics and fellow directors have persistently arraigned him. Central to Catholic teaching is the notion of passive acceptance, whether of God or—more questionably—of the church hierarchy. It is this quality of humble, unprotesting submission to the course of events which forms a major thematic element in Olmi's films, to the extent that in certain of them its presence carries an almost didactic force.

Il Posto, perhaps his most successful achievement, exploits the theme of resignation through a skilful alloy of comedy with a note of wistful tenderness towards its protagonist, a figure the very reverse of the noisy, combative, anarchic heroes dominating the Italian cinema of the period. Domenico, soft of speech, somnolent of gaze and not without a hint of foolishness to colour his bashful innocence, is the perfect employee, who finally obtains his place at the empty desk in the formidable room full of silent clerks not through any preternatural merit but, it is implied, as a reward for his modest, tranquil passivity.

The figures of authority, in what is essentially a brilliant series of vignettes assembled from the most banal aspects of Milanese office life, are women rather than men. While the latter go through a performance of commands, instructions and orders, it is their womenfolk who, Olmi suggests, are the real managers and manipulators. Domenico is seen obeying or complying with the wishes of a succession of dominating females, above all his formidable mother, who chooses an overcoat several sizes too large for him, rather than the more glamorous garment he has fancied for himself, and the girl Antonietta whom he has met during the exams and interviews for the job and who is shown, despite the presence of a watchful

mamma in the background, to have a will of her own.

Women are equally decisive and independent elsewhere in Olmi's films. The best-known of his recent works has undoubtedly been *L'albero degli zoccoli* (tautologically rendered as *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs*), an expansive, multi-faceted portrayal of life among the Lombard peasantry during the closing years of the last century. Here the theme of uncomplaining, inarticulate acceptance is made central to the narrative. When Minek, Batisti's clever little son, loses his clog on the homeward journey from school, his father cuts down a tree to make him new shoes. Since everything around this peasant family belongs to the feudal landlord, he has the right to evict them from the farm, a type of communal holding shared with three or four other family groups and known as a *cascina*.

Their departure from the *cascina*, which rounds off the film, is watched in silence by their neighbours, who, significantly, do nothing towards consoling them or expressing the least outrage or sorrow at what has happened. Passivity masters these people to an almost terrifying degree: the topical background of socialist agitation is given what appears to be a deliberate lack of relevance to events, a point made with even greater force when a newly-wedded couple, visiting an aunt at a convent in Milan, happen on the notorious street battle of 1898 in which General Bava Beccaris ordered his troops to charge on an unarmed crowd and massacred fifty people. Interestingly, it is the village priest Don Carlo who is unwittingly instrumental in bringing about the Batisti family's tragedy by suggesting in the first place that Minek be sent to school. A further suggestion that a poor widow in the *cascina* despatch her two sons to the orphanage to be brought up

The Tree of the Wooden Clogs.



there is rejected by all three of them.

Are we indeed supposed to applaud this and to see any hint of movement or uprooting as destructive of essential peasant cohesion? Few recent films have seemed so wholeheartedly to endorse such conservative values, and Olmi's courage in making *L'albero degli zoccoli*, the longest and most opulent of his works, looks almost like foolhardiness when we consider that the 1970s were years of triumph for the Left, and politicisation of everything from fashion to food was flavour-of-the-month among style-obsessed Italians.

The film, however reactionary, is not a right-wing tract and offers no apologia or doctrinaire affirmation on behalf of the life it observes. What does emerge, here as elsewhere in Olmi's work, is a distinctive vein of pastoral nostalgia, with the director reaching back towards his own family's peasant life in the Bergamo region where he was born. As always in his work, self-conscious visual attractiveness, at purveying which Italian film-makers have been lethally gifted, plays no real part. Rusticity is not romanticised, yet viewed nevertheless as something whose components and rhythms are desirable alternatives to the mechanistic lifelessness surrounding modern urban man.

This sense of a pastoral ideal is, so far as can be seen in the context of recent Italian cinema, unique to Olmi. The memory of a huge agricultural population of feudal tenants and landworkers is much too fresh in the minds of most Italians for them to view the country as anything but a bore or an embarrassment, and where a rural consciousness has developed, it has come in the form of practical environmentalism, rather than through a sense of the beauty of landscape or an interest in birds and plants.

Olmi's pastoral vision, or, more

broadly considered, his preoccupation with his characters' longing for a better world they have been forced to leave behind, takes various forms. In *Il Posto*, for instance, Domenico's family live in what is essentially a Lombard *cascina*, with chickens running about the yard amid the relics of agricultural life, which the suburban sprawl of Milan threatens to overwhelm. A forcible contrast is provided by the office, with its soulless files of desks, its clocks, typewriters and duplicating machines.

In *I Fidanzati* the director, capitalising on his early experience as a maker of industrial documentaries for the Edisonvolta company which employed his widowed mother, uses a drab backdrop of factory installations and building sites to create a world of featureless dreariness in which his leading character, Giovanni, begins an affair with a local girl less in a mood of genuine enthusiasm than out of sheer ennui. The world of the Milanese dance hall he has visited with Liliana, the girlfriend left behind, turns into a dream along the traditional lines of 'our pleasures were simple but we were happy'. For Olmi's protagonists there is always a better time and place to hanker after, and the past exerts an irresistible grip on the present.

What his films sanctify above everything else is the fascination of the ordinary, the unglamorous and the mundane. His heroes and heroines are never given anything in the way of inordinate good looks, intelligence or wealth and the camera seldom lingers on them as objects of desire. It is through their innocence and vulnerability that they engage our attention, though Olmi has always been reluctant to sentimentalise his characters or to present himself as being specifically the champion of the little man or merely a modish *ouvriériste*.

Long Live the Lady!, however recognisably its author's, extends his range in unexpected and, some may feel, alarming directions. A sly vein of comedy, based on an unerring eye for small social details and a gift for gentle mockery of pompous, rotund officialdom, runs right the way through his work, colouring even a film of such apparently serious allegorical intent as the pseudo-biblical *Camminacammina. Lunga vita alla Signora!* inflates this into unrestrained satire, in which the whole world of designer consumerism among the Italian super-rich is made to seem heartless, grotesque and absurd, folding into the lavish, intensely episodic treatment of the theme a mish-mash of symbols, elements of fairytale and a curiously old-fangled moral undercurrent based on the hero's slow process of maturity.

The music says it all. Telemann's *Tafelmusik* is a series of instrumental suites written to accompany grand baroque banquets, and its use throughout the film, in a succession of sumptuously scored overtures and skirling fanfares, tells us everything we need to know about the ironic manner in which the occasion and most of its participants are to be observed.

At an immense Gothic fortress in the Lombard Alps, a place worthy of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 'La Signora' is being given a festive dinner, to which an assembly of the international Great and Good have been invited. Nothing must be left to chance, and the feast involves laborious preparation by an army of myrmidons and flunkies, few of whom appear to care for their mistress or for each other. The majordomo is a terrifyingly caricatured amazon in tweed knickerbockers, in whom a growing irritation with everything around her gives way during the meal itself to a hopeless drunkenness. A mysterious



pair of silent, elderly maids are seen spreading silver lamé sheets on the beds. The keys to the cellar are kept by a gruff-voiced woman in a billycock hat and muddy wellingtons, and the castle is guarded by a giant Baskervillean hound, whose role only achieves its significance in the final moments of the film.

Attendants at the banquet are six trainee waiters, boys and girls from a cookery school which has taken them through the mysteries of placement and napkin-folding in an interminable cycle of videos. Though in theory they are simply there to do a job and to prove that they can do it well, it is predictably these insignificant figures on whom Olmi focuses his attention. Each of them is in some way affected by the occasion's preposterous immensity, but none more so than young Libenzio, whose thick pebble spectacles threaten at times to steal the show.

As played by Marco Esposito, Libenzio is the Olmian hero to an almost self-parodying degree. Pallid, moon-faced and for the most part utterly silent in absorption of everything around him, he becomes the critic and arbiter of events while simultaneously acquiring strength through his own defencelessness. In the thick of the festivities his father arrives, the archetypal Bergamasc peasant in a battered trilby, straying in, as it were, from *L'albero degli zoccoli* and the director's own childhood. For the moment Libenzio, captivated by the specious glitter within the castle, is too embarrassed to accept the intrusion with pleasure, but the essential truth that the grand event is a sinister sham has already started to show.

The eponymous Lady herself is a saurian crone draped in black, with bonnet, veil and silver-topped cane, who is speechless throughout the proceed-

ings, consumes nothing but a glass of wine through a golden straw and makes the occasional peevish communication with her throng of gilded sycophants via the assiduous factotum on whose arm she leans. The guests are served a meal which blatantly guys the excesses of nouvelle cuisine and its sophisticated offshoots. One of the courses is a clear soup in which a live frog swims in each individual bowl, while the *clou* of the whole feast, ushered in with every available ceremony, is an immense fish, of stupendous ugliness, whose appearance and gradual dismembering merely enhance the air of menace and unease which hangs over the occasion.

It soon becomes obvious that the company, rather than the callow youths who wait on them, are the figures most on trial. Under the fierce scrutiny of the Lady's lorgnette, various of the guests go through agonies and contortions of good behaviour, while others find ways of defusing the tension through argument, flirtation and social solecisms. The ritual, however, is allowed to pass off without serious interruption and, after watching a video devoted to her global assets, the Lady totters bedwards amid a trickle of applause.

Her eyeglassed stare is answered as inexorably by Libenzio's spectacles, and it is his version of events that we come to accept. The vision is that of a dreaming adolescent, for whom the castle increasingly becomes a place of fantasy and deception, symbolised by the mysterious imprint of a bow-tie which the boy discovers on the stones of the cellar steps. At dawn on the morning after the banquet, Libenzio, seized not so much with fear as with a simple need to rid himself of the insidious craziness in the castle's claustrophobic atmosphere, flees into the Alpine pastures, dropping his waiter's bow-tie as he escapes. The film's final image is of the boy

gambolling with the great slaver hound which has pursued him.

The trouble with *Long Live the Lady!* lies in its sheer profusion. It seems to suffer from the very extravagance its satire condemns. Into the film Olmi has thrown much from his earlier work, under the umbrella of a satire which threatens at times to become coarse and repetitive in the handling. Libenzio is the archetypal Olmian innocent, yet he is also the prophet and the poet whose imagination shapes what we observe. Flashbacks relate him specifically to a religious world: he is seen as a child transfixed by the sentimental charm of sacred images and under the enthusiastic tutelage of a young priest who latterly would doubtless be involved in one of the charismatic youth movements so popular in Catholic Italy.

Those around him are the bad-tempered, self-important, contentious figures who disturb the humble serenity of life elsewhere in Olmi's work. Women once again dominate and steer the proceedings, but this time they are bizarrely accoutred viragos in the employ of a creature who at times appears scarcely human. The hard-nosed humorous realism of *L'albero degli zoccoli* and *I Fidanzati* is, by implication, left outside the castle with Libenzio's family. The world within is that of the self-indulgent, canting, gluttonous rich, its potential dangers exaggerated by satirical distortion yet at the same time curiously blunted by an excess of incidentally funny but ultimately obsessive detail.

Olmi's indignation and amusement at the manners and customs of big spenders are the more understandable in the context of an Italy which is currently feeling so smug about its economic performance, but the territory of caricature, embodied at its most blatant by the Lady herself, whose rubber face makes no concessions to realistic make-up, is not one in which he shows himself at all secure. Whatever its incidental pleasures, owing something to a glance or two at Buñuel and Chabrol, the film is vitiated by a tendency to squander its resources, as if the director were indulging the pleasure of playing with his materials rather than constructing from them. In the past Olmi has been the great observer of life from below, expert in the use of a carefully limited palette whose strengths derive from its muted tones. The crudity and diffuseness of *Long Live the Lady!* must seem, in this context, like a betrayal.

Despite such shortcomings, *Long Live the Lady!* remains very much its author's work and, as such, one of the more arresting offerings from the Italian cinema of recent years. Olmi's is a distinctive eye, and even his momentary lapses become interesting in the context of an Italian film culture which seems increasingly to be losing direction and identity. His sturdy singularity of vision makes his new film *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* the more eagerly awaited.



Il Posto: the Olmi hero.

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THOMAS ELSAESSER
Pays a centenary tribute to F. W. Murnau

Of all the film-makers who have made the German cinema famous, F. W. Murnau (b. 28 December 1888—d. 11 March 1931) is the least known, the most enigmatic, though probably the one best loved by film directors, especially in France. The reasons for such a paradoxical blend of neglect and admiration are partly biographical, partly due to the films themselves and the mutilation or destruction suffered by almost all those made between 1919 and 1924.

Born into a family of well-to-do Bielefeld textile manufacturers, Friedrich Wilhelm Plumpe (he adopted the name Murnau in honour of an artists' colony in the Bavarian Alps) was by all accounts a shy and sensitive child, quite the opposite of an extrovert show-business talent like Ernst Lubitsch. According to his brother, already as a young boy, he 'overflowed with imagination. The dreams that seemed to weave themselves round his being at night surrounded him during the day as well.' The person Wilhelm was closest to

during his early years was his elder half-sister, a painter who encouraged him to stage plays as a family entertainment (not unlike Goethe and his hero in *Wilhelm Meister*).

After studying philology in Berlin, and then art history and literature at Heidelberg University, Murnau became a pupil of Max Reinhardt, working as an actor and assistant director. In 1915

**'Murnau died prematurely;
his films stay eternally young.'**
—Lotte Eisner

he was called up and served in the army, but after a transfer to the Luftwaffe and flying numerous missions, he came to spend the remainder of the war, owing to an emergency landing during fog, as an internee in neutral Switzerland. There, he won a national theatre competition and made propaganda films for the German Embassy. The deepest wound the war inflicted on him seems to

have been the death on the Eastern Front of his friend (and lover?) Hans Ehrenbaum Degele, son of a Jewish banker and art collector, whose mother virtually adopted Murnau. The Degele villa in Berlin remained his home from 1918 until he left for America.

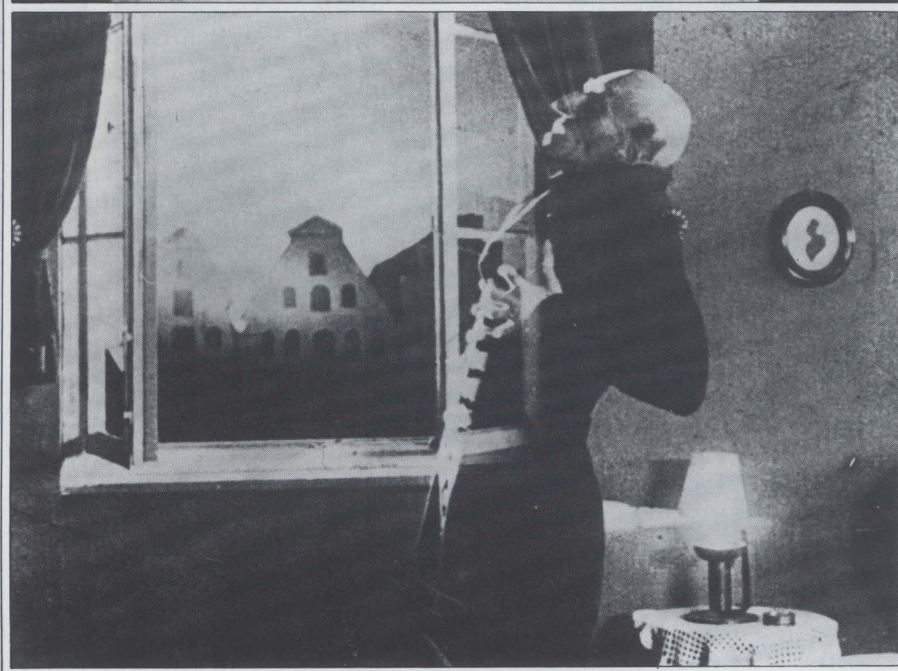
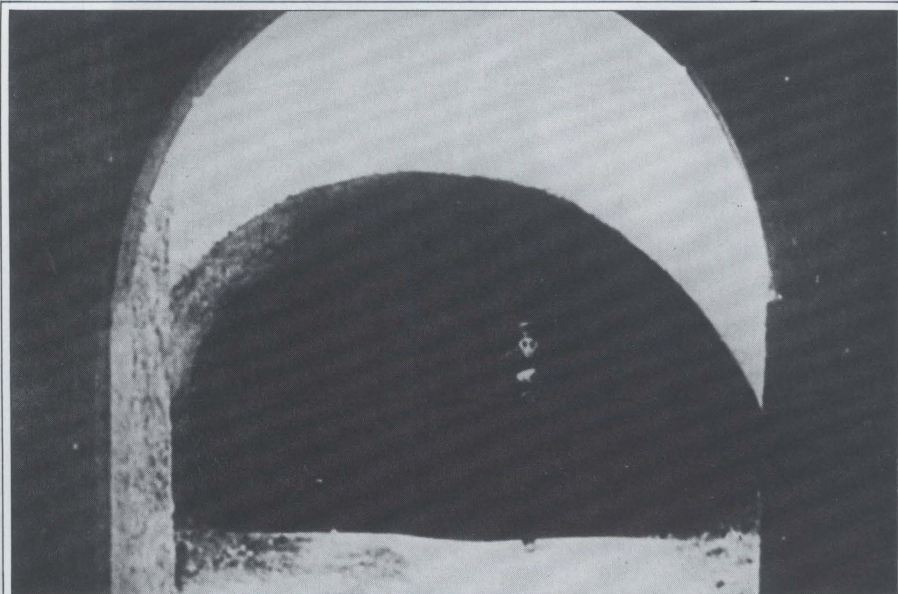
His earliest feature films were financed by the matinée idol Ernst Hoffmann. The second, *Satanas* (presumed lost, like five other early projects), had Conrad Veidt in the role of the devil, and is said to have influenced Dreyer's *Leaves from Satan's Book* and Lang's *Destiny*. Murnau achieved his first popular success with *Nosferatu—Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922). To this day this classic horror film has remained his best-known work. However, it was the big studio productions (*Grossfilme*) made for Ufa which followed from 1924 onwards (*The Last Laugh*, *Tartuffe* and *Faust*: all three star vehicles for Emil Jannings) that gave Murnau power and a name in the film industry.

Despite a meteoric rise to international renown (first in Germany, then in Hollywood), his personal life remained shrouded in mystery and gave rise to many a myth: not least because he jealously chose to protect his privacy. In Weimar Germany, where the cinema had to fight hard to make itself socially respectable, Murnau—like his rival Fritz Lang—allowed himself to be portrayed by the studio publicity machine as a dandy, an aristocrat of the spirit and a visionary of a new art. Cultivating this aura, he retained his aloofness: to himself he was a footloose adventurer.

After the success of *The Last Laugh*, William Fox hired Murnau in January 1926 to work in Hollywood, much to the publicly voiced disappointment of Erich Pommer, head of Ufa, who had counted on Murnau helping the German film industry compete against the American companies, which throughout the 1920s were busy buying up the best foreign talent. Fox wanted Murnau not only for his skills and his reputation as a director who could reach international audiences, but because the studio was keen to advertise its artistic ambitions by a name that connoted European style and sophistication. In Hollywood, too, 'Dr Murnau' quickly acquired the reputation of being difficult and a recluse; not unlike Greta Garbo, one of his few close friends.

He was said to have consulted astrologers, occupied himself with Eastern philosophy and strongly believed in the occult. *Sunrise*, his first film in Hollywood, was a box-office failure, but is now generally regarded as Murnau's most lasting achievement. He made two more films (*Four Devils* and *Our Daily Bread*), before breaking off his contract with Fox and forming an independent partnership with Robert Flaherty to make *Tabu*, set in Tahiti and intended as the first of a series of films on the South Sea Islands. But differences with Flaherty led Murnau to complete *Tabu* on his own, under considerable financial strain.

Nosferatu: 'the play with light and shadow, the painterly compositions...'



Murnau's last, ill-fated journey from Los Angeles to Monterey seems to have been undertaken in order to forestall the very destiny that lay in store for him; he died in an automobile accident on his way to arrange his steamship passage to New York, having been warned that he should avoid travelling on land. Only eleven mourners were present at his funeral. Whether true or merely part of the Murnau legend, this account of the circumstances of his death is a strangely apt tribute to his aura. It seals his life with a melancholy gesture of mysterious irony, not unlike that emanating from his films.

Expressionism

The films in fact only deepen the mystery of who Murnau finally was. At first sight—from *Der Gang in die Nacht*, *Nosferatu*, *Phantom*, *Faust* and *The Last Laugh to Sunrise*, *Our Daily Bread* and *Tabu*—scenes of the supernatural, the otherworldly, the fantastic, of night-time, nightmare and transgression predominate, rendered in a style that has the pictorial qualities of *Stimmung*: the play with light and shadow, the painterly compositions and plasticity of the image. All these are generally associated with cinematic Expressionism. Yet it is difficult to distil from the diversity of the subjects a strongly personal statement of the kind attributed (wrongly or rightly) to Lang's pessimistic visions of fate, authority and power, or to Pabst's socially committed but coolly sardonic realist films.

Looking at Murnau's work today, allows one perhaps to arrive at a more definite view of the director's authorial voice, without losing sight of his acknowledged eminence as the silent cinema's outstanding lyrical genius. But first it is worth clarifying a common assumption: that Murnau was an Expressionist director. Most so-called Expressionist films (but especially Murnau's) properly belong to the stylistic heritage of German Romantic painting (notably C. D. Friedrich, Spitzweg, Kersting), rather than to the bold colours, the shifting perspectives and jagged lines of the artists associated with *Die Brücke* or *Der Blaue Reiter*. Robert Wiene's *Dr Caligari* and Paul Leni's *Waxworks*, with their painted sets and distorted angles, are exceptions, even among the films of the early 1920s, as Lotte Eisner has already shown in *The Haunted Screen*.

Murnau, it is true, knew Else Lasker-Schüler, Renée Sintenis and Franz Marc, all of whom could be called Expressionists. But Lotte Eisner, in her book on Murnau (Secker and Warburg, 1973: the most important study of his life and work, and the source I am drawing on for much of the above), mentions an influence on the films which is important, in visual values no less than in the deeper spiritual resonances, but is less often discussed than either Expressionism or the stagecraft of Max Reinhardt: the Scandinavian cinema of the teens. The work of direc-

tors such as Sjöström and Stiller, Urban Gad and Benjamin Christensen is marked by outdoor realism, a poetic treatment of landscape and a very controlled, understated portrayal of psychological or even frankly melodramatic conflicts—no doubt indebted to the drama of Ibsen, as well as the stories of Selma Lagerlöf, but realised in a visual style unique to the European cinema during its first formative period between 1909 and 1919.

Most of these features are to be found in Murnau, and if one were to summarise his own unique contribution to the cinema, it would be the evocative, utterly realistic depiction of a natural environment, blending almost imperceptibly with exquisitely crafted artifice, whether it was a large, studio-built set (the hotel in *The Last Laugh* and the city in *Sunrise*), or an intimate scene (the first meeting of Faust with Gretchen in Marthe's garden). *Der Gang in die Nacht* (1920), for instance, is Murnau at his most Scandinavian. Based on a Danish story, it was the second film with *Caligari* scriptwriter Carl Mayer, and the double love triangle has much in common not only with the Expressionist classic, but with countless other 'serious' film melodramas of the period. But unlike *Caligari*, it revels in chic modern interiors, and the sequences by the seaside are highly evocative of the natural locations. The scenes featuring the women characters in particular show a truth of gesture and psychological nuance that contrasts starkly with the histrionics of the men, including Conrad Veidt.

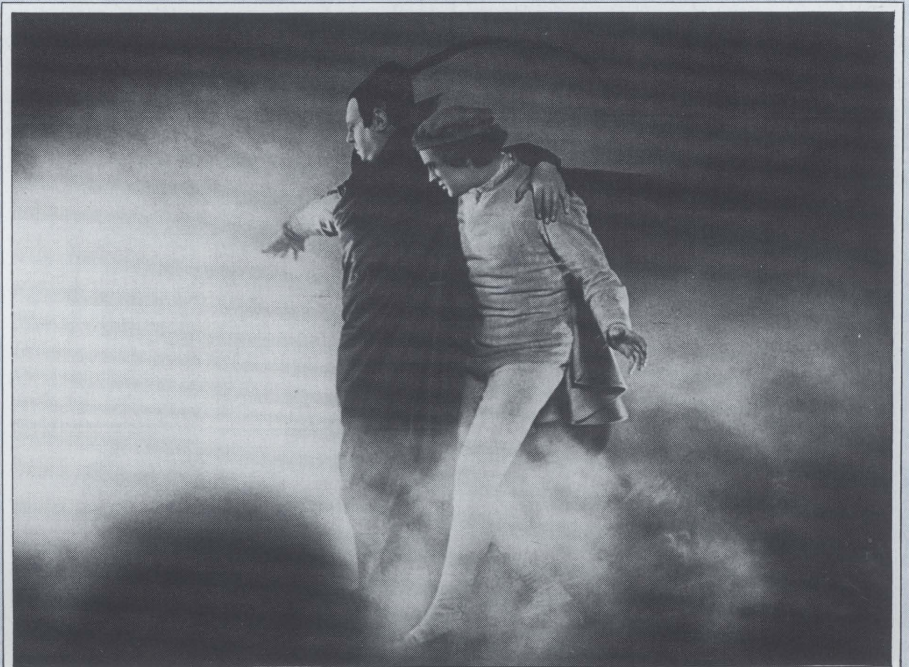
Murnau's art, one might say, comprised an ability to naturalise artifice, and to heighten reality to the point where the action is suffused with an atmosphere at once lyrical and uncanny, ethereal and mysterious. Despite the unforgettable make-up of the vampire in *Nosferatu* (always framed in angled doorways and coffin-shaped apertures)

or the beetling antics of his acolyte Renfield, the film was mostly shot on location in the Baltic ports of Rostock, Wismar and Lübeck, and for the Transylvanian parts, in the High Tatras of Czechoslovakia. In some of the scenes shot there, a rock, by the magic of framing and light, can look malicious and menacing, while during the sea voyage and the entry into the port, the mere lapping of water against a boat fills the image with foreboding.

What makes Murnau's films seem 'Expressionist' is their stories, as well as the often tormented psychology of his characters. In this respect, one needs to remember the undisputed contribution to his films by two of Germany's most professional and prolific scriptwriters of the 1920s: Carl Mayer and Thea von Harbou. Harbou wrote or co-wrote the scenarios of at least four, while Mayer was the writer responsible for no fewer than seven of Murnau's twenty-one films. Indeed, so important has this collaboration seemed to some, and so baffling the personality of Murnau, that critics were tempted to assume, for a film like *The Last Laugh*, that the creative honours should go to Mayer, the cameraman Karl Freund and the art directors Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig. Yet Harbou also wrote the scripts for most of Lang's German work, as well as for films by Joe May, Carl Dreyer, Arthur Gerlach, while Mayer authored scripts for Wiene, Gerlach, Walter Ruttmann, and 'chamber plays' for Lupu Pick, Paul Leni and Paul Czinner.

The versatility and adaptability of these two writers thus goes well beyond a single style, and it seems likely that Expressionist films functioned—for the brief period they were in vogue—more like a genre than the manifestation of a unique *Weltanschauung*. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, since both Mayer's and Harbou's scripts for other directors resulted in very different films

Faust: Emil Jannings, Gösta Ekman.



from Murnau's, his vision would seem to be distinct from theirs: *Nosferatu* (sc: Galeen), *Phantom* (sc: Harbou), *Sunrise* (sc: Mayer) and *Tabu* (sc: Flaherty) have more in common with each other than any of them has with *Scherben* (sc: Mayer, dir: Pick) or *Dr Mabuse* (sc: Harbou, dir: Lang). It suggests that while the German cinema of the 1920s underwent many changes in manner and style, Murnau's remained constant, at least from 1922 onwards, without, however, like so many others of international fame, the director becoming slave to his own public image.

Each film seems to set itself a distinct task or problem, realised in ways that were to inspire at least two generations of European and American directors. It is this style, devoid of obvious themes and obsessions, that is so difficult to talk about, but its marks were understatement, subtle nuance, humour and allusiveness: the very opposite of Expressionist pathos. *Nosferatu*, for instance, is justly famous for its sense of ominous dread, heart-stopping anguish, but also for its tongue-in-cheek humour and high-spiritedness, especially in the figure of the naive Harker, never at a loss to play down the portents of evil and disaster, however palpable they might be on his own neck.

Style

If one wants to understand Murnau's importance, not only for the German cinema of the 1920s but as a pioneer in the history of visual forms and as a truly independent artistic spirit, one must guard against identifying the man too quickly and too anecdotally with his work. The temptation is to let the mysteries of his private life transform him into a character from his own films (half ghostlike *Nosferatu*, half light-hearted Jonathan Harker). On the other hand, understatement and elliptical narration should not be seen as the inevitable consequence of a reticent and introverted personality.

To begin with, the cinema was both too new a medium and too complex a

financial and organisational undertaking to allow for such a direct correlation of character and aesthetic form. Secondly, too much has been made of the 'German soul', baring itself in the films of the Weimar Republic. More prevalent, especially among German directors, was an almost scientific interest in experimentation, in exploring visual effects and technical possibilities, around (even for the period) rather conventional or fanciful story material. Although, according to Karl Freund, Murnau rarely looked through the viewfinder himself, had little interest in the nuts-and-bolts of film technology and was gauche with his hands, there can be little doubt that he had not only a prodigious visual imagination, but also a very precise sense of the framing, camera movement or camera position needed to attain an effect.

Murnau's *Faust* and Lang's *Metropolis* are the two outstanding technical achievements of the Weimar cinema; the former containing such a dazzling display of special effects that it remained unsurpassed until Kubrick's *2001*, almost fifty years later. *Faust's* space travels, the miniaturisation of the sets, the host of other no less impressive optical and design marvels are an indication of Ufa's unique roster of creative technicians (many of whom found their way into Hollywood studios). Right from the opening, when during the prologue in Heaven, the Archangel appears and light pierces the clouds as if we were witnessing Creation itself (pipes were installed to blow jets of steam against a backdrop, lit by a battery of anti-aircraft searchlights), the spectacle is meant to enthrall all the senses.

Faust is also proof of Ufa's determined effort to enter the world market. The cast was to have been international on a grand scale, with Jannings the only German among the principals: Gösta Ekman from Sweden, Yvette Guilbert from France, and as Gretchen, Lillian Gish. But Gish insisted on her Hollywood cameraman Charles Rosher, and so Camilla Horn, first employed by

Murnau as Lil Dagover's double on *Tartuffe*, was 'discovered'.

One point to remember is that both Lang and Murnau (the two most original film-makers the German cinema has produced) derived the guiding principles of how to give form to their films from architecture (in Murnau's case, aided by a designer of genius, Robert Herlth), at least as much as from the theatre or literature (though it must be said that, especially for Lang, von Harbou was a pulp writer of genius). Both directors were also adept at using the visual effect of a given period or painting style. This is another reason why the analogies with Expressionism are misleading, despite the fact that, like Expressionism, German films often did construct a space not governed by the laws of perspective.

Murnau, too, rarely adopted the habit of staging entire scenes in depth as practised by the French, nor did he take on the clipped realism of the Americans, with its reliance on shot-counter-shot, the variations of angle and constant reframing for the sake of keeping up pace and momentum. The German cinema of the 1920s often returned to frontal compositions reminiscent of the proscenium stage or the dramatic tableau. Murnau, however, used the two systems (deep-focus sets, and flat, foreshortened spaces) as contrasting alternatives within the same film (*Phantom*, *The Last Laugh*, *Faust*), thereby extending the emotional space towards the screen: as suddenly as the depth of a frame opened up, it could, in the very next shot, become suffocatingly close and ominously encroach upon the spectator. It was one way Murnau integrated outdoor photography and natural locations into his psychological interiors. By concentrating much of the emotion on the gaps or distances between the shots, he developed the drama in the implied space that surrounds the frame, always absent and yet always palpable.

Narration

Murnau's style requires an attention, a way of seeing that most of us, as ordinary cinemagoers, have never learnt. From Hollywood films we generally expect to 'take in' an image or a scene as quickly as possible, and to pick up from it the clues to 'what happens next'. Not so in Murnau: we have to acquire a visual and a dramatic memory in several dimensions, as it were, like listening to a musical composition, alert to the repetitions of a motif and the variations it undergoes, its merging and collision with other musical phrases, in addition to following the linear development. It is a distinction that can be argued better if one looks at some 'technical' aspects: Murnau's narration, his editing and the way he composed his scenic space.

By narration I do not mean the story itself, as much as the manner of its telling (the ironic moments, the humour, the things that are left out, or

Schloss Vogelöd: deep-focus sets.



only ambiguously implied). This obliqueness in turn affects not only the tone of a film, but the feeling one has of a structure which escapes the mere retelling of the plot. *Nosferatu*, *The Last Laugh*, *Faust* and *Sunrise*, for instance, are films that convey the sense of a narrative at once simple in its folk-tale 'inevitability' and mysterious in its overall meaning and shape. By contrast, the structure of *Schloss Vogelöd*, *Phantom* and *Tartuffe* immediately intimates complexity, even obscurity—in the power-relations that obtain between the characters, how they interact, by spying or trying to ensnare each other with disguises. In the films which affect the naiveté of the folk tale only a closer analysis could unravel the stories within the story, so a glance at *Nosferatu* may help to make the point.

Deflecting the narrative, for instance, and forcing its linear flow underground are the different voices, successively or simultaneously called upon to tell the tale. The chronicler of the plague, Harker's boss who sends him to Count Orlok, the Book of Vampires, the villagers with their anxieties, the ship's log, the inserts of documents, diaries, newspapers: so many agents of the narrative, relaying information, more or less reliable. Not unlike *Nosferatu* himself, mastermind but also enmeshed in the events, the majority of the characters are at once inside the fiction and standing outside it.

Thus the lines of force, of attraction and repulsion which link *Nosferatu* and Harker, *Nosferatu* and Ellen (but draw in everyone else, too) weave a subtle network of communication. What establishes itself is soul-contact rather than eye-contact, charging the film with a kinetic energy that gives the act of vampirism a metaphoric significance, reverberating through the film. It takes in the plague, the *Demeter*, her unfortunate crew and the burghers of Bremen, but also the natural-history lesson of the Professor, who seems to trace a malevolent genealogy from plant life to animal existence, from carnivorous orchids, polyps, spiders and flies, rats, hyenas and horses, all the way back to the playfulness of a small kitten. A similar chain goes from Ellen's anxious affection as Harker sets off, to the servility of the peasants, the dangerous hospitality of *Nosferatu*, the craven dependence of Renfield, the sadistic exploitation of the ship's crew, until it returns full circle with Ellen's sacrifice, offering herself to the terrible visitation.

Such parallel strands come into existence (mostly in that space outside and beyond what the images actually show) because the narrative is purposefully unspecific in its time frame, equivocating about what happens when and in what sequence. Hence, several causal chains seems to exist side by side, interlaced with each other by a complex and at first sight disorienting alternation between different action spaces and locations. To take one of the most striking examples: as Harker makes his



The Last Laugh: space, light and Emil Jannings.

return on horseback, and *Nosferatu* smuggles himself into Bremen in the ship's hold, we see shots of Ellen at the seaside, longing for the return of her beloved.

This cross-cutting between Harker, *Nosferatu* and Ellen is not for reasons of suspense, at least not in the way we normally understand it, when faced with an agonising will-he/won't-he, or when witnessing the proverbial race-to-the-rescue. Rather, what Murnau builds up here is a kind of architecture of secret affinities, too deep or too dreadful for the characters to be aware of, and even for us happening only at the edges of our perception, but none the less lodging in the viewer, too, that pull between horror and fascination which the vampire exerts on the protagonists.

Space and Light

This example already implies another aspect that makes Murnau's style distinct and original: his treatment of space. Two French directors, Alexandre Astruc and Eric Rohmer, have both written searching articles (in the case of Rohmer, an entire book) on the subject. For Astruc it was as if, with every shot, a Murnau film starts anew. Which is to say, Murnau treats a scene, and sometimes the individual frame, as a self-sufficient unit: in its formal composition, how it determines figure movement, what gestures it elicits.

To our Hollywood-accustomed eyes, this usually has the effect of slowing the film down, making us wonder not only about the connection between one shot and the next (a link, as we have seen, we are meant to fill in for ourselves), but unsure about what is happening in the frame, since often enough we are shown something that does not seem to advance the narrative unambiguously, but picks up an action at the point preceding or following the climactic

moment. Thus, when Harker discovers the crypt, the scene is edited in a way that makes us unsure of what exactly Harker has seen, and of what he has seen, how much he has taken in. Murnau here relies on breaking the rules of continuity editing and above all (in a scene so crucially concerned with seeing) he almost completely avoids using point-of-view shots of Harker. Instead, the impression is that it is *Nosferatu* who watches Harker, even though the vampire, his eyes closed and hands folded, lies dead in his coffin.

Disconcerting as this may be, it draws the spectators—those willing to see with their inner eye as well—into what Rohmer and others have called Murnau's imaginary space, one following a different logic from that of cause and effect. Although almost always taking its cue from the 'real world', it finds its coherence in the urgency of a desire, an obsession, an anxiety or a wish. It is important not to confuse this 'dream-logic' with the subjective shots, the painted sets and looming shadows of Expressionism (of the latter, admittedly, *Nosferatu* has its fair share). What Murnau does is to eliminate, pare away and underplay what Expressionist *mise en scène* strains to display.

For this, he developed a highly complex montage style: unusual for German films of the period, *Nosferatu* has more than 540 shots. Again, a famous example to illustrate the issue: Harker, terrified by the approaching vampire, presses himself against the side of his bed, and we cut to Ellen, back in Bremen, starting up from a nightmare. Is she dreaming what we are seeing? As if he had heard her silent scream, *Nosferatu* ceases to advance towards Harker and abruptly turns round, looking off-frame to the right. Cut back to Ellen, now sleepwalking, advancing to the left and extending her arms in a gesture of welcome. Whom is it



Jannings in *Tartuffe*: adapting the space to the actor.

addressed to, Harker or the vampire? The logic of the imaginary space constructed by the editing implies the latter, intimating a fatal attraction and anticipating the final embrace.

Even more typical than the editing effects across shots is the way Murnau animates the space within the frame. Robert Herlth has given a telling account: 'I had always designed the sets first and drawn in the figures afterwards. But under the influence of Murnau I now began to sketch the people first. We thus came, by our third film, *Faust*, to adapt the space to the actor: for example, Gretchen's mother's room became merely a frame for the robust presence of Dieterle, who was playing Valentin. And Faust's study was not designed as a single room, but, in accordance with the shots, in four separate parts. The hall in *Tartuffe* consisted merely of a wall: its dimensions were suggested by the shape of Jannings walking up and down with his breviary in his hand—all that was needed was an effect of relief. Depth of field, which the specialists made such a fuss about at the time, was to us, in this particular case, immaterial.'

Crucial for these effects were Murnau's lighting techniques. In films like *The Last Laugh*, *Faust* or *Tartuffe*, Jannings' upright or slumping, sweepingly expansive or furtively lurking though none the less always massive bulk contributes the real drama. But it is the lighting that gives this shape its energy. A good example is the opening scene of *The Last Laugh*, often quoted because of the mobile camera, swooping down the open lift shaft, travelling across the vast lobby, and passing through the glass door into the open, all in (almost) a single shot. However, it is as if this movement is orchestrated by the towering figure standing outside, flailing his arms and hailing taxis.

What ties these motions together, animates them from within, is the light, falling first on the steel cage of the lift, bouncing off the chandelier in the lobby, its reflections caught in the revolving glass panes, intensifying in the headlights of the approaching cars and finally, emitting the appropriately high note, becoming that sliver of silver which is Jannings' whistle. In fact, it seems the main reason why it is pouring with rain in this scene is for the light to catch itself once more in the wet, glistening folds of the doorman's capacious oilskin, before Jannings takes it off to reveal the shimmering gold braid and buttons of his livery.

'Art,' Murnau is supposed to have told Herlth, 'consists in eliminating, but in the cinema it would be more correct to talk of "masking".' Murnau preferred light to come into the frame from an unknown source, or to exaggerate the effects of a visible light source, such as Mephisto swinging his lantern in *Faust* or the moonlight casting its pallor on the illicit lovers in *Sunrise*. This practice has direct implications about motivation and causality, leaving both ambiguous. It thus is chiefly responsible for 'psychologising' the protagonists (the German speciality), in contrast to the American cinema's concern with motivational realism.

Furthermore, it underscored a general tendency in Murnau's films, the temporal and causal reversibility of the action, the non-individualised, abstract function of glances, eyeline matches and figure motion. Fate becomes embodied in lighting, and light—instead of bringing clarity—is the source of the uncanny. In Hollywood, the same 'Rembrandt lighting' (adopted by directors such as DeMille) was used for dramatic purposes, in order to naturalise artificial lighting, motivating it explicitly in the service of verisi-

mitude, rather than interiorising and spiritualising its effects.

What this means is that, in one sense, the lighting developed by German cinematographers like Karl Freund, Fritz-Arno Wagner and Carl Hoffmann recreates or simulates the tactile values of oil painting. It gives images that curious sense of the spectator wanting to touch them, and at the same time, experiencing them as stylised representations. The image becomes a fetish, an object endowed with a special luminosity (being lit and at the same time radiating light), which is to say, light is both active and passive, in short, it embodies 'essence'. Thus the object becomes irreducibly present, there—by a process which confers this presence on it artificially from off-frame, off-scene.

Lighting therefore enacts in the most efficacious manner, and on the plane of perception, the relations which obtain in Murnau's cinema between process and product, cause and effect, motivation and meaning, origin and value: they become reversible, exchangeable, substitutable, equivalent. Herein perhaps lies the secret of his metaphoric style, that fluidity of forms, those startling analogies and parallels through which the real world, brilliantly evoked by his cinematographers, becomes none the less a 'forest of symbols' and the reason for his reputation as *the* poet of the silent cinema.

Narrative and Male Sexuality

Siegfried Kracauer was perhaps the first critic to suggest that the narratives of the German cinema in the 1920s were symptomatic of a certain ambivalence in male self-images and male sexuality. *From Caligari to Hitler* ties this observation to a very problematic socio-political analysis, but there is no doubt that the type of stories preferred by the 'Expressionist' cinema show recurrent features of crises in identity (the motif of the double) and bisexuality (love triangles in which the two men are usually 'best friends' and show a highly ambiguous attraction for each other).

Murnau's films are no exception. For instance, in its imperious demand for tragic sacrifice from everyone, *Der Gang in die Nacht* is rather typical for that strain of masochistic melodrama which Kracauer identified as part of Weimar Germany's wallowing in defeat. Doubles abound, whether by way of disguise (*Schloss Vogelöd*, *Tartuffe*) or split male characters (*Faust*, *The Last Laugh*, *Sunrise*). Likewise, there are several crucial films where a pure, almost asexual love is threatened or destroyed by the intrusion of another male's predatory attentions—to the man (Nosferatu/Harker, Wigottschinski/Lubota in *Phantom*, Mephisto/Faust, Tartuffe/Orgon, Hitu/Matahi in *Tabu*).

In a number of films, women exercise a kind of diabolical power and embody everything that takes from a man his dignity and self-esteem: the Baroness

Safferstedt, demanding a 'crime' from her lover as proof of his devotion (*Schloss Vogelöd*), the monstrous house-keeper in the framing story of *Tartuffe*, and the vamp from the city in *Sunrise*. The tenement block in *The Last Laugh* is a nightmare of chattering, spying, deriding, castrating matrons. Indeed, the dualism in the doorman's soul, represented by his authoritarianism when in uniform, and his abject submission when it is taken away (by the matron in charge of acres of starched linen) becomes an extension of the opposition between tenement house and hotel washroom (a haven of male friendship and solicitude), revealing a radical ambiguity of attitude which all but subverts the film's humanitarian or social message. The improbable plot premise (a doorman in a plush hotel would never do a porter's job) and the so-called tacked-on happy ending would seem to have their roots in a narcissistic childhood idea of omnipotence and a homoerotic fantasy, in which the doorman and the nightwatchman ride off as the perfect couple, with a young footman as their son.

Ever since Lotte Eisner in *The Haunted Screen* remarked on Murnau's guilt feelings about his homosexuality and the pressures he was under from very homophobic German legislation, the issue of sexuality in Murnau's films has been a topic of speculation, notably his intense but highly ambivalent representations of bodily presence and physical beauty. Some commentators, for instance, have seen *Tabu* as Murnau's intimate film diary and the ultimate home-movie: beautiful bodies diving for pearls, darting canoes, languid and yearning limbs stretched out or embracing. The French surrealists admired *Nosferatu* mainly for its eroticism, contrasting the anodyne puppy-love of Ellen and Harker with *Nosferatu's* necrophiliac lust, musty and potent at once, exuding the aroma of dank crypts and leathery flesh. And in *Tartuffe*, in order to convey how pleased Tartuffe is with himself and his wily impersonation of piety, Murnau lets Jannings perform little intricate ballets of servility and grave concern, and contrasts them with scenes where Elvira, having to endure the sight of Tartuffe's gross appetites, almost faints with disgust.

Comparing *Nosferatu* and *Sunrise*, Robin Wood has argued that sexuality itself is branded in Murnau's films as the source of evil. *Nosferatu*, according to him, stands for carnal desire in general (in the tradition of vampires, he lusts after male and female victims), and so Nina, expressing that mixture of desire, curiosity and horror so typical of the film, must die along with *Nosferatu*. The vamp(!) in *Sunrise* as *Nosferatu's* soul mate: both are depicted as strong, active, unnatural, night-time creatures, in contrast to the domesticated females, but also when compared to the naive males, who can transgress or be tempted, but, like the heroes of German legend, preserve their innocence.



The Last Laugh: a nightmare of chattering matrons.

That there is in many Weimar films a displacement of (hetero-)sexuality into anguished looks, sexually more potent doubles and mirror-images reflecting the repressed, darker sides of desire is well-known, and therefore the background against which Murnau's representations of beauty and eroticism have to be seen. If his films carry some special secret message (about Murnau the man) in the narratives, it is unlikely to be about a love that dare not speak its name, but rather of passions that find fulfilment in distance and contemplation, sometimes of an idealised self-image, as in *Faust*, whose hero is seduced chiefly by an image—that of himself as a beautiful young man.

This is indeed the moment of a very special *frisson*, an extreme point in Murnau's cinema, so much of which is about mediated desire, desire of an image, for an image: the open secret of film-making itself, intensely eroticising the very act of looking, but also every object looked at by a camera. That the world is beautiful when viewed through a lens is the devil's pact to which, it seems, our century as a whole has succumbed, and which Murnau's *mise en scène* resists, framing the image once more and making the viewer share the very process of metamorphosis.

Because he often kept his story material at arm's length, approaching it with meticulous care, but also with a certain deadpan or wistful irony, Murnau is the very opposite of a 'spontaneous' director, keen to capture the fleeting charm of the lived moment, in the way that French directors might: Feuillade, Epstein or later Renoir. The will to form and the drive for abstraction which he shares with Lang make his work sometimes seem cold and remote, as if his figures were already touched by intimations of mortality. But as a look

at his style can show, much of his experimentation with space, shape, light and rhythm was designed to wrest the cinema from the hold that theatre had over the German art cinema, while not falling prey to the fascination of the real itself. In this respect, his films are also about the possibilities of cinema, trying to discover what forms emerge when inherent qualities of the medium—the discontinuity of shot from shot, spatial symmetries or gestural repetitions, alterations and visual rhymes—are explored systematically. To become sensitive to these qualities, is not, I hope, to turn the films into arid intellectual exercises, but to deepen one's awareness of their poetry.

This poetry, however, is not helped by the fact that many of Murnau's key films have not survived in the way that he had planned or edited them. Not only were they cut by distributors; often incomplete or perishing prints were later reassembled according to an idea of dramatic pace or continuity alien to Murnau's original conception. To appreciate his manner, we also need sharp, luminous prints of the films, rather than the washed-out, fuzzy or smudged duplicate copies generally in circulation, and which for decades have shaped our view of the silent cinema in general, and the German films in particular. Happily, on both fronts (authentic continuity versions and newly struck prints), the efforts of scholars, archives and film museums the world over are paying off, though often funds are still lacking to make these restored glories available to a wider public. Let us hope that thanks to the centenary, it will be less than another hundred years before the youthful vigour of Murnau's films is not just a matter of historical record, but a living reality. ■

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JARMAN'S SILENT MOVIE

Who are these? Why sit they here in twilight?
Wherefore rock they, purgatorial shadows?

In the half-light of a flickering gas flare a group of bedraggled soldiers huddles round a stagnant pool. As one raises a battered bugle to his grimy lips, a thin rain starts to fight its way through the dank polluted atmosphere. Only the sound of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* confirms that this is indeed a film set and not the corner of some miserable field of war.

Derek Jarman is supervising the filming of what he calls a 'silent film, shot as were all silent films to music.' The location is itself like something from a war drama. Darenth Park Hospital, a series of massive Victorian buildings, was once home to hundreds of mental patients but is now derelict and dangerous. Set on a rise overlooking the A2 near Dartford, it is a superb base for filming. The gloomy boiler-room where the soldiers gather is one of a number of vast cellars where a variety of sets have been constructed—if that is the right word for the creation of desolation. Other parts of the one safe wing have been adapted for production offices, dining area and all the other requisites of a film shoot.

'The hospital is the star,' asserts Jarman. 'What we have been able to do here has transformed the whole shape of the film.' Originally to have consisted in large part of 'found footage', documentary material of the wars that have disfigured this century, *War Requiem* will now be dominated by Jarman's own dramatised scenes. Indeed, he now feels he actually has enough footage to construct a complete film from the location shooting, all of it carefully matched to the appropriate section of Britten's oratorio.

Since much of it consists of long takes, editing will be relatively simple, which is more than fortuitous since this is planned to be one of the most swiftly completed films on record. The three-week shoot was scheduled to wrap on 5 November (and at halfway Jarman was precisely on target), with the film premiered in London just two months later.

The urgency stems from the fact that this is the BBC's first venture into theatrical features. The Corporation has bought the UK television rights and is bankrolling the £1m production in return for being able to broadcast the film at Easter. Producer Don Boyd is satisfied that the intervening three months will be long enough to ensure that the film has the sort of cinema exposure appropriate to a picture aimed at a much broader audience than any previous Jarman film.

If all goes according to plan, Boyd has similar productions lined up: a Ken



War Requiem: filming at Darenth Park Hospital.

Russell version of *La Symphonie Fantastique*, maybe even a Godard *Ninth Symphony*. Hopes that *War Requiem* would prove successful were greatly increased when Boyd and Jarman persuaded Lord Olivier to take part at the age of 81, despite previous announcements that he would never act again. 'Now, which of you is the producer and which is the director?' he had enquired mischievously of his nervous supplicants at their first meeting, before entertaining them with unrepeatable tales from a life in the limelight. Now the film is to open with that famous voice reciting a Wilfred Owen poem before the original recording of the *War Requiem*, composed for the reopening of Coventry Cathedral in 1962, takes over.

Meanwhile, down in the darkness, Jarman and cinematographer Richard Greatrex, both in boilersuits and wellingtons, confer about the various possibilities. Though the basic structure is clear enough in his mind, the director is evidently prepared to accept new ideas as they emerge, to adapt to whatever actors, setting or fortune may bring. 'I honestly don't know how it's all going to turn out,' he says unconcernedly—

though the music naturally provides a firm base. At one point he calls for the playback and talks through the camera movements as he listens; at another he asks everyone to listen to a section. 'Play the music, I might think of something.'

The scene now involves two soldiers kneeling by the pool, scooping up the muddy water in their hands and pouring it over their faces while a smoke machine adds to the already foul conditions. One shot goes so well that the projected two scoops are extended to five before Jarman and Greatrex agree to cut. The unfortunate actor grimaces painfully as he wipes the filthy liquid from mouth and eyes. Jarman is sympathetic but amused. Through everything he remains in calm good humour, immensely affable and egalitarian despite, it is discovered later, having a drawing pin in his boot all morning. With this director and this crew sabotage is not suspected!

While making pop promos, Jarman had often wondered what it would be like to shoot a longer film with classical music in the same sort of way: now he is finding out and apparently enjoying every minute of it.

BUY BRITISH

Every year the top ten films in British cinemas are predominantly American while equally meritorious home productions languish a long way behind. Simon Relph, chief executive at British Screen, is well aware that there is little to be gained from making decent pictures if nobody sees them, and the British Film Marketing Initiative has been launched to consider how to rectify this situation. 'I'm looking for situations in which British films can do well,' says Relph. 'We can't compete with the majors in terms of promotional budgets and so we have to find ways of focusing attention on British movies.'

Among those intrigued by this idea and interested in how it might be achieved were the producers of Channel 4's *Media Show*, who approached Relph and suggested a programme on the subject. Further, they put forward the notion of contacting advertising agencies and asking them to 'pitch' for a campaign on behalf of British films. Since the BFMi had a proposed budget of only £1m to be spread thinly over three years, it could clearly not itself afford to hire a major agency; but the glamour of television exposure was enough to lure agencies into risking their reputations on the exercise. What is more they would do it for nothing.

Nine or ten agencies were approached and three finally selected which covered a range of size, tradition and approach. At a briefing session late in August, each was given barely a month to research the area and come up with a hard campaign. Even at this stage disparities in attitude were marked. The

small and aggressive HDM Horner Collis & Kirvan were brimful with enthusiasm and foresaw few obstacles. The established giant J. Walter Thompson gave little away, reserving their options, while Collett Dickenson Pearce were, from the start, instinctively dubious about the whole concept.

Naturally, such differences were reflected four weeks later when each agency sent their team of three to the *Media Show* studio in Clerkenwell to outline their solution to the Great Problem. The resulting programme in which the admen present their campaigns will, by the time these words appear, already have been broadcast (the scheduled date is 20 November) and many readers will have seen it.

Briefly, HDM proposed creating a British Film Mark, an identifiable label to be used on the films themselves and wherever they are being promoted, presumably along the lines of the British Film Year logo. Their suggestion was a bowler-hatted gent made of a strip of film, a male and Anglo-oriented stereotype that won little favour with the programme's Scottish presenter, Muriel Gray. JWT put forward a campaign using the films themselves, illustrating their concept with the example of *A Fish Called Wanda*. A commercial would be designed that started with a clip but developed with John Cleese stepping out of the frame and into a cinema auditorium to explain the plot so far to a latecomer, thus tantalising the TV audience into wanting to see the film.

Ironically, this example served to highlight one of the questions raised by the CDP team: what is a British film in

the first place? *Wanda* may have been creatively British, but it was an MGM movie, financed in Hollywood. To CDP a British film is about as identifiable as a British car, and not necessarily more attractive. 'Do people really care where a film comes from provided it satisfies them?' CDP concluded that this was 'an intractable brief' and that Relph was asking the impossible. 'Advertising people are not superhuman,' it was revealed. 'We've got to have something to sell to know how to sell it.'

As CDP account director Mark Lund elaborated to me later, there must be a real doubt as to whether a sum as paltry as £1m is best spent in this sort of way. Apparently what may sound like a lot of cash to you or me buys 'only' 4 OTSS (opportunities to see, I gather) and dwindles into insignificance when compared with the promotional money splashed around by other leisure industries. Even in terms of film it has to be seen in the light of the £250,000 or more that a US company will regularly apportion to the publicity budget of any big film it plans to release here. Lund suggested that other ways of allocating the million might be more effective—in trying to encourage financial institutions to invest in films, or in creating a unit trust in which small investors could put money into a portfolio of British films as 'angels'. Of course, the problem then arises of how to sell the films...

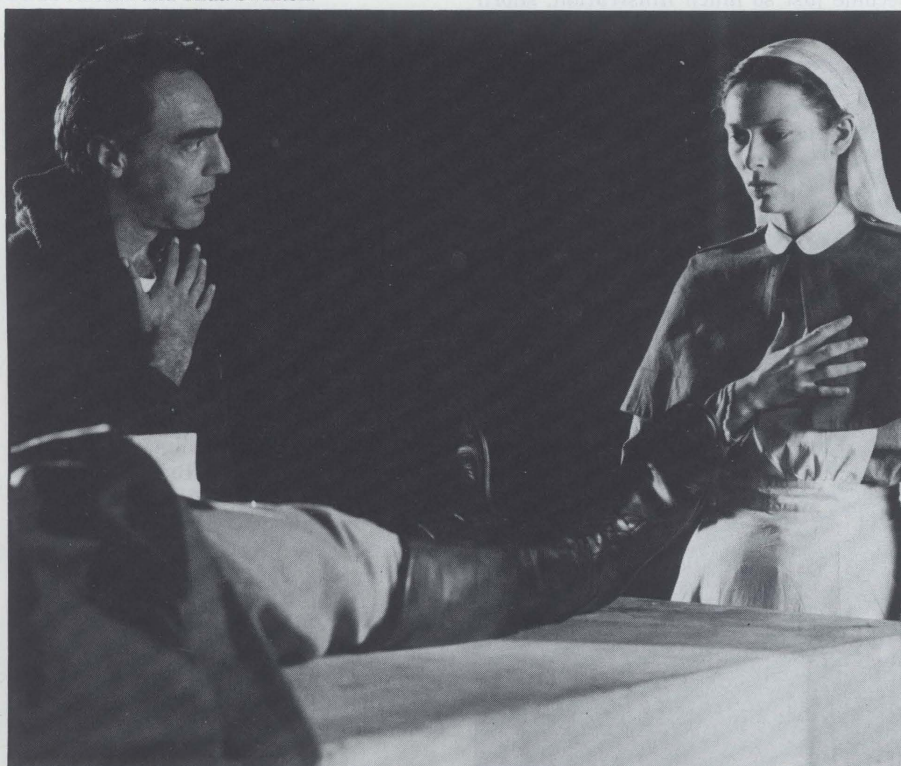
Realistically, a full-scale ad campaign will always be beyond the scope of the BFMi: much of the budget would probably be eaten up employing the agency in the first place. Relph still hopes that 'advertising will play a part in the promotional initiative' but doubts very much whether anything will come of this particular exercise. In the end it probably served only to confirm what he already knew—that the problems of the industry are too big to be solved even by a major advertising campaign. Instead he is likely to concentrate on trying to raise the critical profile of British films and to effect changes in the exhibition/distribution system, but that is another story.

GOING DUTCH

If advertising is used, Relph might well ponder the experiences of a similarly well-meaning attempt to promote the cinema in Holland. There the aim was not to wave the flag for local products but to encourage cinema-going in general, on the face of it a more straightforward task. Not so, apparently.

The Dutch national film trade body, the Nederlandse Bond van Bioscoop Filmondernemingen, approved a scheme using posters, billboards and press advertising based around a slogan and fake movie stills. If the decision not to use real stills is curious, the main controversy arose over selection of the

Derek Jarman and Tilda Swinton.



tag-line. The original intention was to proclaim that, 'In the cinema you forget it's only a movie.' At the last minute the unfortunate implications of this formulation were recognised and the word 'only' was removed, though to many it still appeared to suggest that audiences should be encouraged to forget they are watching a film.

At a press presentation alternatives were put forward, including the more positive but hardly euphonious, 'In a cinema, you realise what a movie is really like.' Bearing in mind the state of auditoria in both Holland and Britain, one could have some sympathy with the cynic who proposed, 'Watching some movies, you even forget it's a cinema.' All in all, it's hard to anticipate a huge surge in cinema attendances in Holland following this campaign.

A MOMI FOR THE FAMILY

The statistics are impressive. Ten (or is it twenty?) years in the planning, £10m to assemble, technology featuring 75 laser discs, 52 different areas illustrating one or more aspects of film and television. The Museum of the Moving Image was clearly a phenomenon before it ever opened. But none of this means much unless the paying customer is entertained—and MOMI needs to attract 425,000 attendances a year to balance its books. It has already satisfied the critics who have garlanded it with praise, but how will it be evaluated by the family audience upon which its future will to some extent depend? I assembled half a dozen assorted children aged between seven and twelve and descended on the South Bank.

Things started shakily when the ticket machines at the entrance failed

to operate—luckily the doors opened anyway, and that proved to be virtually the last disappointment. Naturally, for an adult with more than a passing interest in every item on display, there was a certain amount of frustration as whole sections were devoured in seconds or ignored entirely, the work of numerous authors, designers and graphic artists just a blur in the mad dash for the next flashing light or exciting sounds. Sadly, where space is used with such astonishing economy, it is not always easy to ensure that potentially fascinating exhibits are not outshone by something flashier a bit further down the yellow brick road which is one's guide.

Without a bit of adult guidance, even the Fantasmagorie might have been missed, a splendidly ghoulish magic lantern show dating back to 1800 which ingeniously creates a horror-show to delight any child. Well, almost any: the youngest of my group announced imperiously that it was all far too frightening and marched off to something more sedate. Oddly, there were one or two moments when one wondered if the planners did have children sufficiently in mind. Are the opening shots from *Un Chien Andalou* really suitable for all ages? Fortunately, only the older members in my party saw them and they seemed no more than morbidly intrigued. The context does lower the impact of Buñuel's shock to some extent—though the memory of razor slicing through eye did less than wonders for one small appetite at lunch later on. I would also find it hard to defend the use of the horrors of Buchenwald as part of a newsreel assembly in which, jammed up against the Epsom Derby, they become just so much illustration, shorn

of their real, devastating meaning.

But this is an adult cavil—the children were just busy enjoying themselves. Whizzing up and down and round about on the 1936 Mitchell camera on the Western set, reading the News at Ten and watching the play-back with a mixture of pride, embarrassment and hilarity, flying like Superman over the Thames by means of a Blue Screen process, making and watching simple animation loops—these were just the highlights. A wishful nine-year-old was fascinated by the Youth Culture exhibit, with any number of aspects conjured up at the press of a button; a seven-year-old was more taken by the ever-delightful zoetropes and praxinoscopes. Slightly depressing for a moment was the mesmerising spell cast by the advertising console, with nine screens running endless commercials into which little ears could tap at will on the headphones. Did this indicate the concentration span of the future? But no: all had to be dragged reluctantly out of the cinema where they had evidently settled in to watch a whole feature.

As it was, this flying visit took almost three hours of continuous pleasure, without one request for a toilet or a single cry for food or drink. No greater compliment could be paid, unless it was the final verdict that MOMI was 'better than the Science Museum'. Early attendances running at a healthy 10,000 a week may owe much to the avalanche of publicity that the project has aroused, but if word of mouth has the power with which it is usually credited I can't believe that those associated with the museum have too much to fear.

HOME(LESS) MOVIE

Reflecting on the difficulties of defining a 'British' film always brings to mind Dick Lester's comments. 'What is a British Film? Whenever I'm asked I always quote *The Three Musketeers*, which was a film whose producer had a Mexican passport and who was the honorary consul for Costa Rica in Switzerland. The company that employed me was from Liechtenstein, the company that produced the film in pre-production was French: it was a Spanish film when it was made. I found out afterwards that I'd probably made the best Panamanian film ever and in the end it qualified for British Academy Awards as a British film. The technicians were almost entirely British but the cast were primarily American and the film was shot in Spain. The money came from God knows where and vanished God knows where. All I know is that whenever one asked the producers about profits they started speaking in Russian.' Dick Lester is Canadian.

FERDINAND

MOMI: family life in the 1950s.



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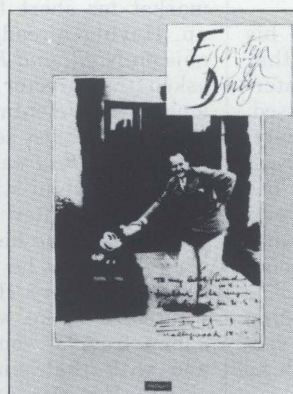
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The PRODUCER The SCRIPT GIRL

If a film professor wanted to assemble a course on European cinema that reflected the most significant, most exciting things going on in the medium over the last thirty years, he might very well start with some films by Alain Resnais, such as his powerful documentary on Auschwitz, *Night and Fog*, his complicated *Muriel*, with Delphine Seyrig, and what is perhaps his greatest film, *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*. Certainly Jean-Luc Godard would have to figure, represented perhaps by the early classics *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* and *Masculin Féminin*. Films by the demanding genius Robert Bresson, *Mouchette* and *Au Hasard, Balthazar*, say, would also have to be included. Finally, to bring things up to date, the professor might want to add Nagisa Oshima's disturbing *In the Realm of the Senses*, still banned in many countries, Volker Schlöndorff's *The Tin Drum*, Andrei Tarkovsky's final film, *The Sacrifice*, and two international successes by Wim Wenders, *Paris, Texas* and *Wings of Desire*.

Classics all—but not exactly films that beckon spectators with promises of easy entertainment. These are works that are difficult and challenging, certainly, yet they also have the power to affect viewers deeply, even occasionally to change their lives. And it is no accident that they share this power, for one man was involved with all of them: the French producer Anatole Dauman. In Europe, this is unusual. Who can even name the producers who worked with Jean Renoir, Luchino Visconti and Ingmar Bergman?

It was during a retrospective of his work at the Montreal Film Festival that Dauman gave one of his rare interviews. Cultured and carefully dressed, Dauman, at 63, is anything but a Hollywood stereotype. His features are East European, his origins Polish. His French is spoken very softly, in a voice roughened by the thousands of Gitanes he has consumed over the years, forcing listeners to creep ever closer. He is clearly a man who is used to being attended to. Long pauses between sentences give the impression that what he says is always deeply considered.

In the last years of the war, Dauman was a member of the Resistance and he later worked for a time with military

security, investigating war crimes. 'Eventually, though, I had to go back to my family in Warsaw. My father was a businessman, and most of his factories had just been nationalised by the new Polish government, but luckily he had a few properties left in Paris. So I went there right after the war.' He worked for a company making short films, and then in 1949 founded with a friend the now legendary Argos Films.

Short films were then much in demand, the obligatory accompaniment to every new feature. From the first, Dauman leaned towards the artistic, producing films on Watteau and Manet, as well as the critic Jean Mitry's *Images*

Anatole DAUMAN

PETER BRUNETTE

pour Debussy. The films began to collect prizes. 'I can't insist enough on the importance of short films,' Dauman said. 'They developed well before the New Wave, and constituted a permanent area of innovation, helping film language to evolve. In those days, a whole group of very good film-makers devoted themselves exclusively to shorts.' Dauman's best-known short is undoubtedly Chris Marker's futuristic fantasy *La Jetée* (1962).

In the late 50s tastes changed and the market for short films suddenly dried up. Having already worked with Resnais on *Night and Fog* in 1956, Dauman asked the director to make a feature-length documentary on the atomic bomb. 'I had just seen a powerful Japanese film, *Children of Hiroshima*, and I thought it might stimulate his imagination. Well, after six months' work, Resnais told me he wasn't getting anywhere and that he was going to give up the documentary. He said what he really wanted to make was a fiction film on Japan from a woman's point of view, and with that simple sentence *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* began. Just to kid him a bit, I said that such a film, based on the idea of memory distorted by emotion, had already been made, and it was

called *Citizen Kane*. He laughed and said the difference would be that Welles' film was in chronological order.'

Dauman and Resnais first considered Simone de Beauvoir and Françoise Sagan for the screenplay. Finally, Resnais suggested Marguerite Duras, then still something of an unknown, at least in cinema circles. 'In a very short time, she wrote up a scenario and recorded it on a tape which Resnais, who had to leave immediately for Hiroshima, took with him. I think the style of the film is related to the cadences of her voice. Those long tracking shots, for example, remind me a lot of her novel *Moderato Cantabile*. In any case, Resnais' talent, transforming the essence of Duras' text into a film, produced a classic which broke the nearly total monopoly that the professional screenwriters enjoyed up to that point.'

For Dauman a classic is 'a film which defies time, which lasts for twenty years, let's say, like a book which stays in people's minds for a century. Especially since one film faded relentlessly follows another. But the thing which perpetuates itself underneath what may seem to be a great many changes is the glue of the story, the narrative structure. There also has to be something new in a film for it to aspire to become a classic. But though you often hear that a film has a "message", I don't think that's right. We're not trying to provide a message service, after all.'

Everyone recognises a classic after the fact. How does one know beforehand? 'I have confidence in directors who make me have confidence in them. I could have been tough and demanding, but I have always let myself be guided by my sympathy with a work or with a man. The thing you have to realise is that the cinema is a game, so money can never be considered an absolute value. Film money is a currency all its own. If it turns out that the majority of my films have become classics, it's because I have a great reverence for talent. Let's just say that I won the game.'

Of course, Dauman has also made some mistakes, which he readily acknowledges. Robert Bresson's *Un Condamné à Mort s'est Echappé* was offered to him by a friend, but Dauman turned it down because he didn't feel that the terms of the contract were stringent

enough concerning budget overruns. 'The film did go over budget, but not by very much, and it was very successful all over the world. So, I slapped my fingers for being too careful perhaps, but I didn't give up the safety principle itself. Then, about four or five years later, Bresson came to see me. I offered him the kind of contract I think he would have been wise to sign with *Un Condamné à Mort* and that's how *Mouchette* and *Au Hasard, Balthazar* were made, under conditions that seem astounding compared with other Bresson films, in the sense that the budgets were strictly respected. So if I didn't help "launch" Bresson, I was still able to contribute to his glory later on.'

Renen Schorr, the Israeli director of the well-regarded *Late Summer Blues*, says that having a producer like Dauman is the dream of every young filmmaker. 'Dauman is not just interested in short-term benefits, making a quick profit. He's in it for the long haul, like a marathon runner, and that is why he has been so influential.'

But what is perhaps most remarkable about Dauman's record is that the films he has produced are not only artistic successes, but are also films which are difficult, even troubling, and which remain so years afterwards. *Mouchette*, for example, so slow and ponderous by conventional standards, its acting purposely stiff, would seem to take

immense courage to produce. 'Actually, *Mouchette* was not as courageous a financial enterprise as you might imagine,' Dauman insisted. 'There was a law in France—it could probably never exist in the United States—which helped to support innovative, quality films. Because of these kinds of aid, I think European film-making can be freer. Given the financial power of Hollywood, we don't try to compete with American films on their own territory.'

'With a very strictly controlled contract and a budget that was not enormous—and *Mouchette's* excellence obviously doesn't come from sumptuous sets—Bresson made something that is very close to a Japanese painting, where a single line can express so much. Also, this was the first coproduction with French television, so I only had to cover one-third of the budget, and Bresson was then at the height of his fame, at least in Europe. Besides, if a film finds even a small public, but finds it all over the world, it will become profitable. So it wasn't a very courageous enterprise after all.'

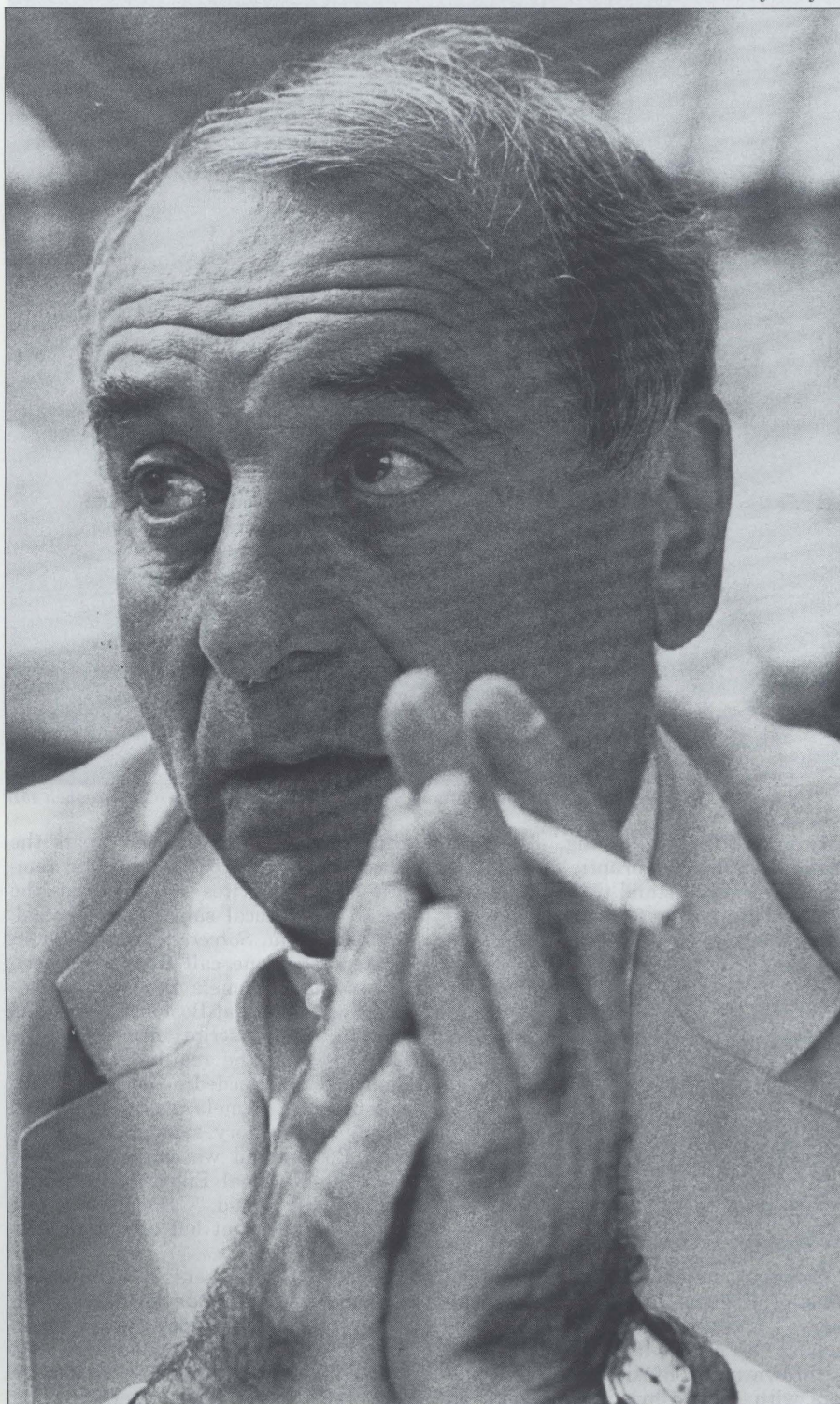
In choosing which directors to work with, and which films to back, Dauman lets himself be guided by considerations which go beyond the financial. 'All the various connections in my professional life have to do with questions of style, a certain style of relationship that a person has with the world and with other human beings. I never go out and look for a new director to work with; rather, I find certain relationships which are pleasing.'

'I would never want to be a director, at any price. You have to deal with the technical side of things, you have to be inspired all the time. It must be horribly draining. Since I don't feel like a failed director, in other words, I don't usually involve myself in the film-making. I used to, when we were making short films. But the older I get, and the more respect I have for talented people—the directors I work with are not exactly beginners—the more I trust these great artists. Of course I give them advice from time to time, but only when they ask for it.'

Dauman was once involved in the process more intensely than usual, when Nagisa Oshima was shooting *In the Realm of the Senses*. 'If the Japanese authorities had known what he was doing, they would have confiscated it as pornography. So after each day's work, Oshima would immediately ship the exposed film to me in France.' He ended up shooting the entire picture without seeing the rushes, a risky venture. Dauman advised him daily by telegram what the rushes looked like, and after the shooting Oshima came to France to edit the finished version.

Dauman firmly believes that both the director and the producer should stick to their own jobs. 'Though what Godard told me is also true,' he admitted, 'that the producer has to be 10 per cent a director and the director 10 per cent a producer.' Nor, unsurprisingly, is Dauman daunted by Godard's political

Anatole Dauman. Photo: Cyril Ryan.



views, which could be seen as threatening to a producer who of necessity must be a successful capitalist in order to secure the financing for a film. 'I think that the "thesis" side of Godard is really a booby trap. What counts with him ultimately is art and cinematic innovation. You know, as Victor Hugo said about Baudelaire, there is a *frisson* of novelty in his work. In my opinion, that kind of thing has little to do with politics. Capitalism, anti-capitalism, it's something of a game for Godard. I don't think it's really an article of faith.'

Dauman's most recent 'discovery' is the German director Wim Wenders, whose only film to have broken out of

the art-house circuit—before he teamed with Dauman—was *The American Friend*, starring Dennis Hopper and Bruno Ganz. Dauman's wife was impressed by Wenders' *State of Things*, the story of a stalled independent film production and the producer's vain excursion to Hollywood to raise funds, and her husband ended up producing Wenders' next film, *Paris, Texas*, which at last won the director international recognition. There followed *Wings of Desire*, the story of an angel (Bruno Ganz) who falls in love and longs to become human.

Wings of Desire is a hallmarked Dauman picture. 'I like the idea that the

story is told from the point of view of the angels. But what makes it work is that these aren't very religious angels. They are close to us, they're very sensual, after all. In any case, it's something new. I've always tried to go to the limit of cinema to find something at least a little bit new, and I think you see that in *Wings of Desire* as well. This film is another example of what's special about the cinema, because a filmmaker can disturb an audience with his strength and energy in a way that cannot be done in any other art form. The cinema seems to generate an unfathomable mystery that the newer media will always envy.' □



Oskar Werner, François Truffaut, Suzanne Schiffman at work on *Fahrenheit 451*.

Suzanne Schiffman would have been quite content to spend her creative life as François Truffaut's behind-the-camera collaborator. She had known Truffaut since she was seventeen, and she contributed to his films for two decades, first as script girl, then as assistant director and, from *Day for Night* (1973) until his last film, *Vivement Dimanche!* (1983), as his co-screenwriter. 'I was never frustrated, even as a script girl,' she said during a recent visit to Montreal. 'I was the one with whom François discussed everything. And I had such admiration for his work, even the films on which he had lost confidence.'

Truffaut's untimely death in 1984 ended all that, and when she tried working as an assistant with other filmmakers, the pleasure was gone. She temporarily alienated her old friend and colleague Jacques Rivette. 'I became

very critical of his filming.' A second engagement ended abruptly after only a week. 'I couldn't stand this other director.' She decided, in fact, that she would never work as an assistant again; and the result, in 1987, was *Le Moine et la Sorcière* (*Sorceress*), her first film as a director.

Suzanne SCHIFFMAN GERALD PEARY

Sorceress, a medieval morality drama, tells of Etienne de Bourbon (Tcheky Karyo), a zealous Dominican friar sent to purge a French village of heresy, who is thrown into confusion by his encounters with Elda (Christine Boisson), an

alluring forest woman who treats the peasants with herbs and holistic remedies. Village rites are held at the grave of the local saint—a greyhound. For Schiffman, *Sorceress* began with an excited telephone call from an American stranger. Pamela Berger, a professor of art history at Boston College, had written a draft script inspired by the Latin texts of the real-life Etienne de Bourbon. She needed a seasoned script collaborator. 'Pamela was very excited telling me the story, saying, "I'm calling from Boston and we can get a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities." I said, "Calm down, or you won't have a grant left after this telephone call."'

Pamela Berger sent a first script, described by Schiffman as 'very naive, with no cinematic shape'. But the freshness of the story attracted her, and Pamela Berger travelled to France so that they could work together on a

revised script. Schiffman's first job was to trim Berger's more enthusiastic speeches. 'There was a monk's daughter who never stopped explaining about religion. I said, "She talks and talks! She's out!" I turned her into a mute.' She also had to break down into manageable parts an immense flashback, 'a big block which completely stopped the action.'

While they were writing, Schiffman had no intention of directing *Sorceress*. 'Truffaut used to ask why I didn't make a film, but I was very happy not taking that step—a happy coward.' Gradually, however, she realised that she was giving her own vision of what *Sorceress* should be on screen and that she really ought to direct it herself. Backing came from a variety of sources, including the French Ministry of Culture and the American National Endowment for the Humanities.

Her main problems were those inherent in making an authentic medieval drama. 'You can't invent while shooting. Everything has to be prepared and ready, every weapon and every costume. You can't suddenly shift locations, because of things like telegraph poles. And animals are a special problem. I have a degree in medieval art history, and I know that pigs of that period are dark pigs with hair, not the round, clean pigs of today. In *The Return of Martin Guerre*, set in the fifteenth century, there were pink pigs that made me laugh. And wolves . . . You have to close off the area where you are shooting, and you can't have actors and a wolf in the same shot. I used a dog which is only half wolf, but I still couldn't shoot him and a baby at the same time.'

The casting was easier. 'Tcheky Karyo as the witchfinder priest has a quality of brutality and weakness at the same time, the child and the monster. He could play both parts in *Beauty and the Beast*, and his face is credible as a

face of the Middle Ages. Christine Boisson is an actress who can walk barefoot and look natural.' And Jean Carmet, who plays the kindly village priest? 'He has played too many twisted bad guys, and it was time he turned into someone human again.'

Suzanne Schiffman met the young men who were to constitute France's New Wave—Truffaut, Godard, Rohmer, Rivette—when they attended the Cinémathèque and the ciné-clubs of Paris in the early 1950s. As a group, they adored the American action pictures directed by Fritz Lang, Sam Fuller and Nicholas Ray and championed the great French individualists, Renoir, Vigo and Bresson. 'All of us sitting in the front rows got acquainted. We talked, and we walked about Paris for hours and, yes, we sat in cafés. There were other girls, more or less in love, who came a few times. But I was the only girl who was like them, friends in love with the cinema. We were all pretty much together. We weren't interested in people who weren't interested in the films we cared about.'

While the others wrote polemical criticism for *Cahiers du Cinéma* and plotted to make movies, she studied art history at the Sorbonne and met and married Philip Schiffman, an abstract painter from New York who was in Europe on the GI Bill to study with Fernand Léger. (Their two sons are now an actor and a cameraman.) She assisted the sociologist Edgar Morin on his massive book *The Imaginary Cinema* and she travelled to the United States for a year to contemplate 'Social Thought' at the University of Chicago.

When the New Wave directors got film projects, Suzanne Schiffman worked as a script girl for Rivette and then Godard. With Godard, 'You had to be present but not seen, and it was very hard to discuss anything with him because he hated questions and there was hardly any script.' It was when she

moved on to work with Truffaut that she began to be part of the collaborative world of film-making. 'The assistant directors, who were always men, were bothered that François would discuss things with me as the script girl. Then we made *Fahrenheit 451* in England, and the British script girl said, "I am the script girl. Don't tell me what to do." I repeated this to François and he said, "Who cares?" He realised then that anyone could be a script girl.'

With *L'Enfant Sauvage* (1969), Schiffman was promoted to assistant director, but with an unusual assortment of duties. She established the work schedule, scouted locations, eventually helped with the casting. 'We would come on the set at 9.30 in the morning and discuss how the scene would be shot in the afternoon. I would look through the camera and come up with ideas. And when François was acting in his films, I was his double. We were the same size, and I would walk through the scene for him. When we shot, he would ask me if it was all right or if we needed another take.'

At about this time, Schiffman ended her working relationship with Godard. 'He was the one real genius we had. But our collaboration stopped in 1968 when he became a wild revolutionary. He crossed the Champs Elysées to avoid me, because I had sold out to capitalism.' Godard assigned Truffaut to his list of political enemies, and attacked him verbally and in print. 'François had had it. He'd put up with all the things Godard had said about him in the papers, but he didn't want to see Godard himself any more. Though he still went to his films.'

The two film-makers 'remained estranged until the end. 'But Godard was very touched by the death of François. That I do know.' Also, in recent years, Godard and Schiffman have talked briefly. 'I get mad at his films because he refuses to tell stories, but I see them all. And I don't think we'll cross the street next time we see each other.'

In 1973, Truffaut told her that she should have credit as a screenwriter, and on *Day for Night* she shared an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay for this autobiographical celebration of movie-making. 'The episode at night in which the director and the script girl [played by Nathalie Baye] are rewriting a scene for the next day because an actor has died—that's what François and I did.' And Nathalie Baye's famous line: 'I could leave a man for a movie but not the other way round?' Schiffman laughed: 'I never said it, but I could.'

At the time of our conversation, she was making another feature, *La Femme de Paille*, a comedy set in Paris starring Jean-Pierre Léaud. 'This time, there are no costumes, no babies, no animals.' There is only one position on the film unfilled: the all-purpose assistant, collaborator and confidante. 'I miss most having someone around to shout and cry with. Someone like me.' ■

Nathalie Baye (left) as the script girl in *Day for Night*.



Mackendrick land

Philip
Kemp

Even in the British film industry, where Years of Crisis occur almost as frequently as wet summers, the memory of 1969 can still raise a reminiscent shudder or two among those who lived through it. That was the year when the Americans pulled the plug; the major Hollywood studios, which earlier in the decade had invested heavily in Britain, found their investment turning sour on them and began to cut their losses. In the general panic, the exit of one of the country's most gifted film-makers passed almost unnoticed: Alexander Mackendrick quit directing to take up a teaching post at the California Institute for the Arts.

It wasn't an abrupt move. 'The feeling had been accumulating,' Mackendrick later remarked, 'that I was in the wrong industry.' All the same, the local crisis contributed to his decision, since two of his most long-cherished projects had just fallen through. *Rhinoceros*, an adaptation of Ionesco's play originally planned for Tony Hancock, had been refashioned for Peter Sellers, who was to play Bérenger to Peter Ustinov's Jean. The two Peters had never appeared together (and, in the event, never did); they could, as Mackendrick says, 'have made a great team'. At the last minute Sellers, neurotically indecisive as ever, backed out, and with him vanished any chance of American financing.

Mackendrick's other pet project, *Mary Queen of Scots*, had been around even longer—ever since his days at Ealing, where it was vetoed by Michael Balcon as 'too disrespectful of royalty'. Over the years Mackendrick had worked on the script with various writers, in particular the novelist James Kennaway; at other times Gore Vidal and Anthony Burgess had taken a hand. Now, at last, production was going ahead. In an interview, Mackendrick provided a tantalising glimpse of the film he envisaged: 'I'm going to cut the lace off the dialogue. My version is a gangster story which smells of cow-dung.' *Mary Queen of Scots*, from the sound of it, would have explored another of those collisions of irreconcilable, mutually incomprehending perceptions (Waggett on Today, the *High Wind* children among the pirates) which recur throughout Mackendrick's movies—in this case Mary as an elegant French lady stranded in a sixteenth-century Boot Hill, a 'frontier territory populated by cut-throats, gangsters and cattle thieves.' Sets were being constructed, and casting was under way, when the project foundered in the crash of Jay Kanter's enterprising, ill-fated programme for Universal.

Not long after this debacle Mackendrick, rather to his surprise, was offered

Top to bottom:
The Man in the White Suit:
Alec Guinness, Alexander Mackendrick.
Sweet Smell of Success:
Tony Curtis and Susan Strasberg.
Whisky Galore: Basil Radford (Waggett).
Mandy: Mandy Miller, Godfrey Tearle.
Mackendrick and the *Maggie*.

the Deanship of the Film School at the newly founded CalArts, and decided to accept. Britain, for the foreseeable future, could offer him few opportunities, and he had come to detest working in Hollywood. Nor did he have much taste, or aptitude, for the coming style of film-making in which closing the deal was often more important—and always far more time-consuming—than making the movie. 'To spend, say, 50 per cent of your time trying to get the job, and 50 per cent doing the job—that's a fair break. If you spend 95 per cent of your time trying to get the job, and only 5 per cent doing it, you're in the wrong business.'

Mackendrick's decision came at the end of a decade in which his career, hitherto set on a confident rising curve, had seemed to falter and lose direction. After five films at Ealing evincing increasing mastery in the expression of an ironically mordant, satirical vision—which, especially in the horror-comic mayhem of *The Ladykillers*, came close to bursting the bounds of the Ealing conventions—he had moved to the USA, where Hecht-Lancaster signed him to direct an adaptation of Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple*. When the project bogged down in casting problems, Mackendrick switched instead to *Sweet Smell of Success*, an assignment about as far as could be imagined, in mood, tone and milieu, from the polished ironies of Shaw. Against all expectations, he brought it off triumphantly, adapting his personal vision to the alien genre and idiom with fluent authority.

On the strength of *Sweet Smell*—a box-office disaster, but received by most critics with wary respect—Mackendrick seemed poised to strike out in any direction he chose, equipped with the talent and experience to establish himself as a major director on an international scale. His first setback came with *Devil's Disciple*, now recast and back on the rails; after ten days' shooting he was fired from the picture, accused of working too slowly. His next assignment, *The Guns of Navarone*, ended even sooner. Carl Foreman, scripting as well as producing, resented Mackendrick's attempts to elicit mythic and psychological complexity from the brash heroics of the plot and, with shooting scarcely begun, replaced him with J. Lee Thompson.

During the 1960s Mackendrick completed three films—all problematic, scarred less by production setbacks than by unresolved dissension over tone and concept. With *Sammy Going South*, his final partnership with Balcon, Mackendrick intended 'the inward odyssey of a deeply disturbed child, who destroys everybody he comes up against.' Balcon, for his part, saw it as a simple adventure, fit for a Royal Command Performance. Thanks to spiralling costs, assorted mishaps (not least Edward G. Robinson's heart attack), and consequent script pruning, the film emerged somewhere midway between their two intentions, not wholly satisfying on either level.

A *High Wind in Jamaica* is a hard

film to evaluate, since some quarter of it is missing. Mackendrick, who had longed to film Richard Hughes' novel ever since meeting Hughes at Ealing in the late 1940s, discovered on landing the assignment that Fox, which owned the rights, expected a Disneyified romp, with the eight-year-old Karen Dotrice as Emily and the pirate captain played by Terry-Thomas. With some help from Anthony Quinn, Mackendrick managed to wrench the script—and casting—back towards the spirit of the original, but the shoot laboured under an inadequate budget and Zanuck's hostility. Before releasing the picture, the studio chopped half an hour out of it and rearranged the rest. So far, no prints of the complete version have resurfaced.

Mackendrick's last completed film was *Don't Make Waves*, a Californian beach comedy with Tony Curtis. Rarely shown today, it remains his least-known picture, and one Mackendrick is still reluctant to discuss—'a film of such silliness that it is of no consequence, and it is a humiliation even to have to talk about it. But I think I proved the hard way that the kind of humour I had developed in Britain I, at least, cannot do in America—and I don't think it transplants anyway.' Critical response mostly ranged from puzzled to dismissive, though the film has found admirers—Andrew Sarris and Basil Wright among them.

If Mackendrick can be considered a 'neglected director', it's hardly in the sense of one whose work has been forgotten. Of his nine films, at least four—*Whisky Galore*, *The Man in the White Suit*, *The Ladykillers* and *Sweet Smell of Success*—are widely known and frequently revived, and *Sweet Smell* seems to be ascending from the status of cult masterpiece to that of masterpiece *tout court*. But there has been surprisingly little recognition of Mackendrick's overall achievement, nor—apart from some discerning passages in Charles Barr's

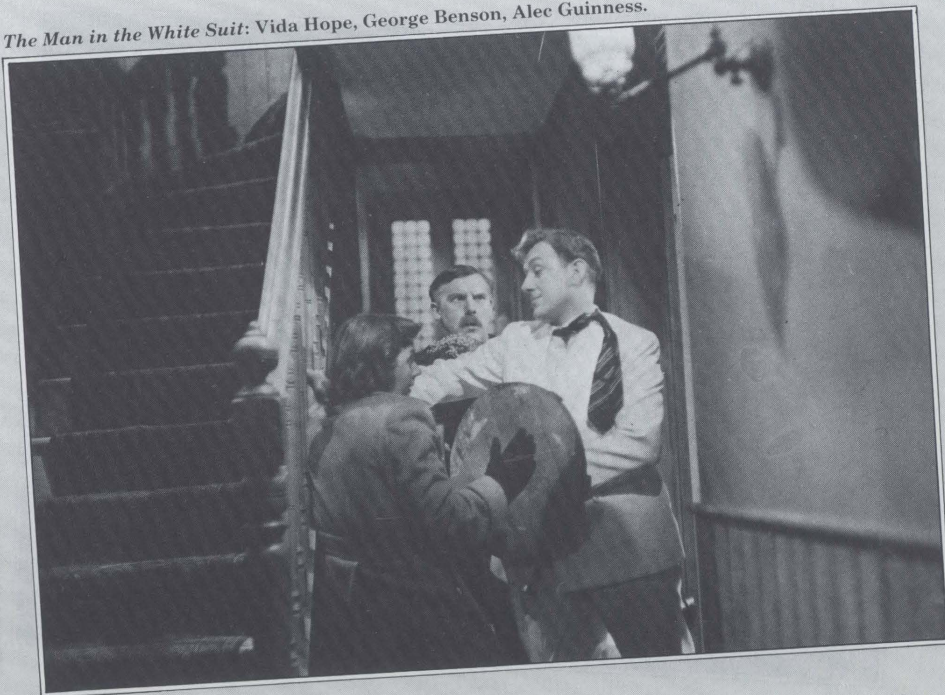
Ealing Studios—much attempt to consider his output as a whole, to trace recurrent structural patterns, thematic or stylistic connections within the body of his work.

To refer to 'Mackendrick's work' is of course an over-simplification, and one which Mackendrick himself, who dislikes the 'utterly unjustified cult of the director', would be the first to object to. The contributions of—for example—William Rose, James Wong Howe, Douglas Slocombe, Clifford Odets, Alec Guinness can hardly be ignored. None the less, there's a good case for treating Mackendrick as the unifying creative force behind the films he directed. Fastidious in his choice of projects and exacting in his working methods, he exercised (except when physically prevented, as with *High Wind*) a high degree of control over all aspects of the film-making process, involving himself closely in everything from scriptwriting to soundtrack, working for weeks with the sound crew of *Man in the White Suit* to realise just the desired jaunty, bubbling effect for Stratton's bizarre apparatus.

The distinctive visual quality of the films, the dramatic density of their cinematic language, can also be credited—more so, perhaps, than with certain more feted directors—primarily to Mackendrick himself. His technique of storyboarding his pictures, sketching every set-up in vivid, fluent strokes conveying with startling economy composition, lighting and camera angle, ensured the emergence of (in Douglas Slocombe's words) 'a strong pattern, a very strong hallmark—every image succinctly plotted to make its point.' The scripts of Mackendrick's films, as Geoff Brown has noted, are never merely words awaiting illustration, but are conceived from the outset in richly visual terms.

But in the end, whatever the supporting testimony of working methods, the films themselves must be what count;

The Man in the White Suit: Vida Hope, George Benson, Alec Guinness.





The Ladykillers:
Herbert Lom, Alec Guinness.

and Mackendrick's work does present a demonstrable creative unity. Any ostensible gap between the Ealing period and the four later films is more apparent than real, tending on closer examination to elide into a matter of surface tone. It's a break, perhaps, more significant in historical terms, marking as it does the abrupt change in working conditions that Mackendrick encountered after the supportive atmosphere of Balcon's studio, and that would eventually lead to his withdrawal from directing.

The reputation of Mackendrick's Ealing films has suffered from the tendency—still widespread, despite Barr's definitive study—for the term 'Ealing' to be applied as indiscriminately as 'Hollywood' once was, before *Cahiers du Cinéma* taught us all better. By this usage, the studio's entire Balcon-era output (and the comedies in particular) can be lumped together into one undifferentiated mass, and branded with some such disparaging epithet as 'whimsical' or 'cosy'. Thus, even so perceptive a writer as Tom Milne, re-

viewing *Local Hero*, could criticise Bill Forsyth's film for taking 'a retrograde step back into the cosy Ealing ethos of *Whisky Galore* and *The Maggie*.'

Such a judgment—though it disregards Mackendrick's skill in working simultaneously both with and against that ethos in ironic counterpoint—can claim some support from Michael Balcon himself, who maintained in his autobiography that 'in our comedies there was nothing unfriendly or ruthless.' But this was Balcon towards the end of his life, looking back in sentimental reminiscence, and discounting much that disturbed him at the time. To anyone approaching Mackendrick's comedies without preconceptions, 'ruthless' is surely the very word that comes to mind. In *Whisky Galore* the wretched Englishman, Waggett, is continually mocked and humiliated by the people of Todday, and finally blown off the island in a gale of callous laughter. Another hapless outsider, the American tycoon Marshall, is cheated, abused and physically assaulted by the crew of *The Maggie*. The Man in the White Suit himself, the young scientist Sidney Stratton, ends up fleeing from a lynch mob of workers and bosses, and *The Ladykillers* culminates in a whole string of brutal murders. The world of Mackendrick's comedies is about as cosy as a snakepit.

Local Hero, indeed, provides a revealing comparison. Forsyth's admiration for Mackendrick's work is well known, and his film does, as Milne observes, recall aspects of both the earlier Scots comedies (besides borrowing Burt Lancaster, grown mellow and benign, from *Sweet Smell*). *Local Hero* also captures something of the mood of Mackendrick's films—the irony and truculence, the shrewdly observed detail and the underlying melancholy. But Forsyth's regard is essentially benevolent, and the film's ending, in which the conflicting interests of all parties are harmoniously resolved, aligns it with the gentler

Ealing tradition of *Passport to Pimlico*.

Far closer to the Mackendrick spirit—so close, in fact, that it can be read as a covert remake of *Whisky Galore*—is Robin Hardy's 1973 offbeat cult movie, *The Wicker Man*. The Waggett-figure of the principled outsider here becomes a devout Glasgow cop, horrified to discover that the people of the offshore island to which he's summoned have converted en masse to full-blooded paganism. And since his unbending integrity is no match, any more than was Waggett's, for the joyous cunning of the islanders, he too is tricked, manipulated and finally sacrificed—literally this time, this being after all a horror movie rather than a comedy—for the good of the community. Hardy's direction may lack Mackendrick's finesse; but in its thematic preoccupations at least—perception and misperception, innocence outwitted by amoral experience—and its stark denial of reconciliation, *The Wicker Man* could stand in for the horror movie that Mackendrick never made.

Charles Barr has written of the Ealing 'mainstream' comedies—broadly, those scripted by T. E. B. Clarke—that 'they constitute a whimsical daydream of how things might be. Mackendrick's comedies are in touch with how things actually operate.' This shouldn't be taken too literally—Mackendrick rarely aims at realism, and the crooks of *The Ladykillers* are as stylised a gang, albeit in a very different register, as those of *The Lavender Hill Mob*. But the two films aptly demonstrate the distance between Mackendrick's gleefully black-veined comedy and that of his Ealing colleagues (Robert Hamer always excepted). Both feature Alec Guinness as gang boss, but the later film's savage killings—or any killings at all, come to that—would be unthinkable in *Lavender Hill Mob*, shattering its gentle make-believe of innocuous villainy.

Ealing comedies, indeed Ealing films in general, are much concerned with the matter of community—how it can be constituted, what sustains or impairs its existence. But if the very word conjures up in this context a warm, all-inclusive, come-into-the-parlour atmosphere, those portrayed by Mackendrick are quite different. The communities of his films—as of Hamer's—are close, dangerous and intensely self-protective, ready to welcome outsiders only on their own exacting terms and vindictive against those that threaten them. 'Any man who stands between us and the whisky is an enemy,' states Sammy MacCodrum with uncompromising simplicity; war is declared on Waggett, and Waggett is destroyed. *Whisky Galore* may be a comedy, but it's also the tragedy of Captain Waggett—and all the funnier for that.

The humour of Mackendrick's comedies persistently homes in on pain. Mackendrick himself cites Max Eastman's *Enjoyment of Laughter* ('The only good book I've read on the subject') for the thesis that comedy, to be effective,

The Maggie: Paul Douglas and ship's crew.

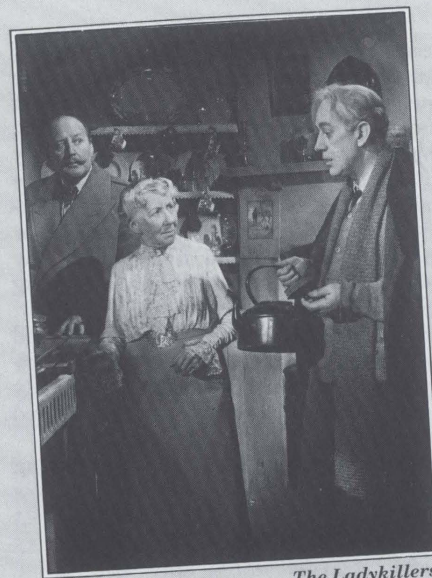


In defining the 'perverted and malicious sense of humour' that informs his films, Mackendrick recalls relating the plot of *The Man in the White Suit* to a Scottish friend. 'I was trying to make it sound as entertaining as possible, and all the way through the most I could get out of him was a slight smile and a glint in the eye. But when I came to the end, when the scientist is practically lynched by both sides—at that point he gave a Gaelic guffaw, and said, "Sandy, that's very good, that's very good; that's not funny!" And I think that's as good a definition as any.'

The structures of society, when tested, prove equally unreliable. Religion scarcely figures; families are absent or oppressive; and the complacent institutions of the social hierarchy rarely inspire confidence. People in authority, from the luckless Captain Buncher of the ss 'Cabinet Minister' (I'm telling you, we're nowhere near any island,' he growls, a split second before the ship strikes) to *High Wind's* craven and drunken Captain Marpole, invariably show up badly. Officialdom, when not corrupt, is mostly ineffectual; if the law intervenes, it either manages to abet the criminals (*Whisky Galore*, *The Ladykillers*), or to punish the wrong person (*The Maggie*, *High Wind*), or both (*Sweet Smell*). The resolution of Mackendrick's films is never to be looked for from external forces; there's no Seventh Cavalry on the way, no god emerging from the machine.

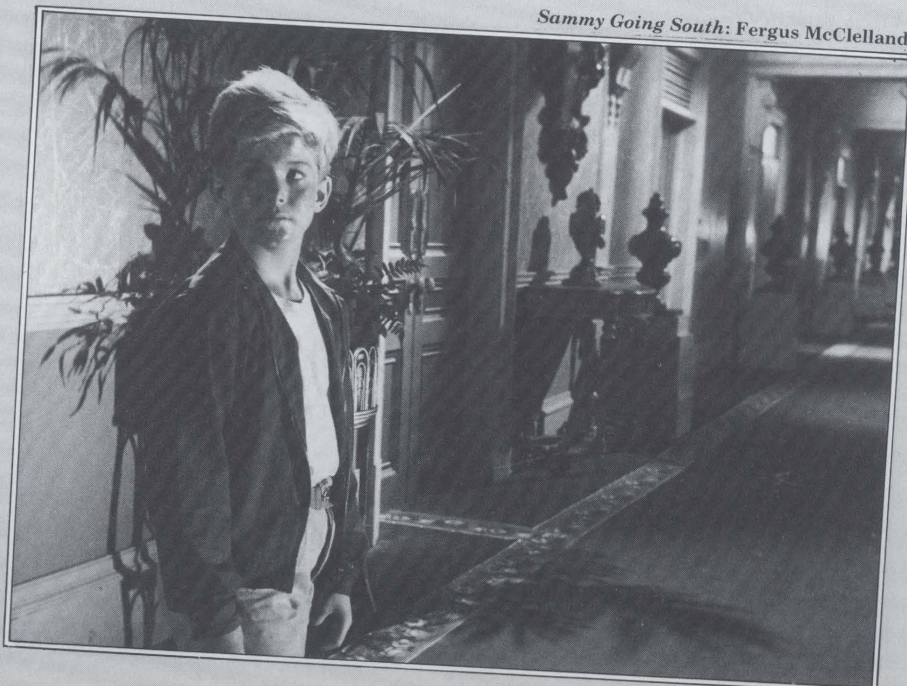
verses. Sidney Stratton, the last seemingly solid ground knocked from under him by his aged landlady, finds his assumptions disintegrating along with his miracle fabric. Like so many others in Mackendrick's films—Waggett, Marshall, Mandy's father and grandparents, Sidney Falco, even the monstrous and all-powerful J. J. Hunsecker—Stratton is forced to confront phenomena that refuse to fit the pre-set pattern he thought to impose on them. Certainty, in the light of Mackendrick's ironic scepticism, represents a provocation, an absurd delusion ripe for the demolition squad.

Mackendrick's characters frequently find not just their systems of belief but even their very identities under attack. Waggett, whose pompous insistence on his honorary rank ('*Captain Waggett, if you don't mind*') meets with bland disregard, is reduced to incoherent splutterings—'*This is lunacy! It's me—I—I—I—I—am Captain Waggett!*'—only to be countered by calm Hebridean logic: 'Ah, but how do I *know* that you're Captain Waggett?' Chavez, the pirate chief in *High Wind* (yet another



The Ladykillers:
Cecil Parker, Katie Johnson, Guinness.

In visual terms, Mackendrick often expresses this kind of psychological onslaught by a redefinition of the cinematic space within which a given character is located. Sidney Stratton, fleeing the lynch mob, twists and turns through a warren of narrow alleys, a jump or two ahead of the game. Rounding a corner, he encounters Mrs Watson, receives her *coup de grâce*—and suddenly there opens around him a clear field, an arena with him at the centre and his pursuers homing in through every



Sammy Going South: Fergus McClelland

access point. And at the beginning of *Sammy Going South*, Sammy leaves the enclosed world of his apartment for just such another maze of alleyways, moving through them with practised ease, only to emerge into the open space of the harbour (emphasised by the full expanse of the 'scope screen, unleashed for the first time in the film) where the lethal warplanes can come screaming down on him from a clear blue sky. Then after the attack, running terrified for home, he finds the alleys stopped by rubble and locked gates—the safely familiar now become dangerous and strange.

In *Sweet Smell of Success*, nothing and nowhere is safe, no matter how familiar it may seem. In this, the most restless and insecure of films, Sidney Falco scarcely dares stay still for a second—and the same goes for the camera, endlessly sidling and reframing as if infected by his nervousness. Even when seated, Falco is all movement, twitching and fidgeting, his eyes, hands and mouth executing constant nimble manoeuvres to evade attack or stake out a more advantageous position. Occasionally, feeling the trap closing on him, he tries to assert a fragile moral ascendancy, rising from Hunsecker's table in implausible outrage, or scrambling up an overhead walkway to distance himself from Kello, the venal cop who incarnates his bloated *alter ego*. In vain; Falco is trapped in the smoky, claustrophobic world of clubs and bars, in the no less claustrophobic New York streets, as in the rat-runs of his own nature. 'You're in jail, Sidney,' remarks Hunsecker, dispassionately contemptuous. 'You're a prisoner of your own fears, your own greed and ambition.'

If *Sweet Smell* shows us entrapment in terms of scurrying, febrile movement, *Mandy* offers its (British?) counterpart—entrapment as stasis, a retreat into the illusive security of a petrified inertia. Denied the chance to break out of her muteness, Mandy is consigned

to her father's stifflingly respectable family, a household patterned after the Cartesian dichotomy: downstairs lives the grandmother, all mindless emotion, while the grandfather sits upstairs playing, not just chess, but postal chess—the most cerebral of games, divorced from even minimal human contact. For playing-space the child has a walled garden, sterile and stony, in which nothing grows but a sundial on which the sun never seems to shine. Outside lies forbidden, undisciplined territory: a wasteground, where cheerfully unkempt children shout and run, and into which Mandy, in the final reel, manages to escape, moving like Sammy from the familiar into the unfamiliar. If openness connotes danger, it also means freedom; both Sammy and Mandy are granted the space to find themselves, to take their own risks.

These moments which define the scope of a character's perception—by the sudden opening-out of a hitherto restricted horizon, or by contrasting a closed mentality with a more receptive one—are crucial to Mackendrick's films. Early in *The Man in the White Suit*, Birnley, being shown round Corland's mill, spots Stratton's apparatus burbling away in a corner, and asks what it is. Mackendrick holds the angle, shooting through the foregrounded apparatus, while the screen gradually fills with bemused figures, arguing, gesticulating, talking across each other—a perfect image of a costive, self-cancelling society. But Mackendrick deftly uses the scene to make two further points. Birnley is far too amused by Corland's discomfiture to notice anything else—just as, later, his delight in putting one over on his competitors blinds him to the wider implications of the miracle fabric. Daphne, his daughter, is the only person present who observes Stratton's trolley nosing in through the door, and then as quietly withdrawing. Not only, we learn, is Daphne more aware, readier to see and

to think about what she sees—she's also (a key factor in the plot) more open to what Stratton is doing.

The act of perception—the way in which our preconceived attitudes lead us to read, or misread, a situation—is central to Mackendrick's films. Repeatedly, his characters are defined by *how they look*—both in the immediate sense of how they appear to others, and (equally important) in the sense of how they use their eyes, seeing or failing to see, discounting whatever doesn't match their expectations. Innocence is dangerous, to itself and to others; those who observe the uncertainty principle, mistrusting appearances, are the more likely to survive (though not invariably, as witness Mrs Wilberforce). The clear-sighted manipulators—Macroon and MacTaggart, Kierlaw and Hunsecker—may be morally reprehensible, but Mackendrick can never withhold from them a certain reluctant fascination.

The lucidity of Mackendrick's style, whose technique, accomplished and inventive though it is, never obtrudes itself into the narrative, serves the same central concern: that we, as spectators, should be invited into the process of perception, allowed to see and evaluate for ourselves. No matter how confused the action on screen, Mackendrick presents it with unflinching clarity. The scene in which Stratton tries to gain entrance to Birnley's house juggles half a dozen conflicting elements of farcical complexity; the characters involved are at hopeless cross-purposes, yet the audience is never in a moment's doubt as to exactly what's happening, and where. By the same token, Mackendrick makes only rare use of extreme close-ups or subjective shots, always preferring to let us judge events whole and unprompted, to choose our own perspective rather than imposing that of one character or another.

It's possible, even, that this very quality of lucidity may partly explain the relative critical neglect of Mackendrick's work—that clarity has been taken for a lack of subtlety or depth. There may be something more urgently enticing, to the critical eye, in directors like Powell or Roeg, whose narrative line is often of such patent eccentricity, whose imagery so evidently packed with hermetic tropes, as to signal immediately that things are going on beneath the surface, inviting excavation. (Which isn't, of course, to disparage either, but merely to register an essential difference in style.) If so, a disservice has been done. Mackendrick's films, certainly, can be enjoyed on the most superficial narrative level—in itself no negligible achievement. But they also offer a richness of cinematic language, a satisfying visual and thematic complexity, and a distinctively individual tone, that yield increasing returns on each repeated viewing. As always in Mackendrick's cinema, the exercise of perception is its own reward. ■

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A High Wind in Jamaica.



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Cronenberg's Creative Cancers

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At the Institute for Neo-Venereal Disease, Adrian Tripod, one-time associate of the now vanished dermatologist Antoine Rouge, learns that one of his patients: '... was once a fierce sensualist; now he has become a pure metaphysician. His body has begun to produce puzzling organisms—complex, perfect, but essentially without function. His disease is possibly a form of creative cancer.' It's a scene from the little shown and even less well-known Canadian film *Crimes of the Future*, shot in Toronto in 1970 for \$15,000 by the then 27-year-old David Cronenberg. Almost a home movie, it foreshadows most of the features which over two decades have singled out Cronenberg as the most disturbing and original director currently working in the field of horror.

All Cronenberg's films but one (a B-picture on car racing called *Fast Company*) have focused on disease or abnormality and are strewn with crazy scientists conducting unspeakable experiments in plastic surgery and genetics. They operate out of clinics whose very names strike terror. Names like the Somafree Institute of Psychoplasemics and the Oceanic Podiatry Group.

In David Cronenberg's films these sicknesses and disorders are discussed po-faced, with detailed attention to their causes and symptoms. Yet in almost every case the pathology is fabricated. There is no such complaint as Rouge's Malady, the illness in *Crimes of the Future* that causes young girls to suppurate from every orifice and others to lick up the effusions. There is no

venereal disease that manifests itself as a peripatetic parasite, given to sneaking up the plughole in the bathroom and taking up residence in the bather. That little monster features in *Shivers*, which goes to show that Cronenberg could be just as gross in 1975 as he was to be in *The Fly* eleven years later.

How can one take the man seriously? Are these not crude exploitation pictures? The products of a sick or cynical mind? Meet him in the flesh, as it were, and the thought never even occurs to you. With his huge, owlsh spectacles and his scholarly, diffident air, he comes across as the archetypal classroom swot. In fact, he would be a sight too serious if he did not also have a sly sense of humour. In his films, this comes out principally in his liking for rum names.



Scanners.

Who better to tell us about the dangers of the television age in *Videodrome* than the famous commentator Brian O'Blivion? Who, incidentally, is already dead in the story and who rabbits on simply as an arrangement of electric impulses on a video. What better name for the scientist in *Rabid* whose plastic surgery causes his patients to sprout spikes under the arm than Dr Dan Keloid—halfway between an android and a cornflake?

There are other names, equally odd and resonant—Nola Carveth in *The Brood*, who literally gives birth to her subconscious (rather like the monster from the id in *Forbidden Planet*), Barry Convex, the 'bent' businessman in *Videodrome*, and (most sinister of all) Darryl Revok in *Scanners*, the man who wants to use his superhuman mental powers to create a new race and put an end to the history of mankind to date. Cronenberg claims that, unlike Nabokov, he doesn't intend his names to be read as literary puns and that, however bizarre, he discovers them all from real life. There really exists, apparently, someone called Arno Crostic, whose name Cronenberg lifted for the rather epicene art gallery owner in *Scanners*. Even so, the names are plainly selected for the *frisson* they impart or the smirk they arouse. Cronenberg admits that until he has fixed on the character's name he cannot write the part, so for him the names clearly mean something.

If bad taste and funny names were all, however, there would be little to distinguish him from, say, John Carpenter, who has also specialised in the nauseous and the revolting. And yet there is a palpable difference when you compare their films. Carpenter's *The Thing* and *Prince of Darkness* have nothing to say. They are such blatant exercises in visceral film-making that tedium sets in at an early stage. The shocks conform to the law of diminishing returns. Cronenberg's films, on the other hand, have plenty to say. The science may be spurious but it challenges our complacency.

Cronenberg's films hinge upon the notion that, if Darwin is right, there is no reason to believe that man is the end of the evolutionary road. Like Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, these movies are about what might lie beyond *homo sapiens*. In them, character after character is born with special powers, attempts to acquire them or is changed through the workings of disease or genetic engineering. In *Scanners*, science breeds a special class of supermen with enhanced mental powers, capable of bending the will of others and of inducing spontaneous combustion or a cerebral explosion in anyone who stands in the 'scanner's' way. Only the fanciful drug ephemeral can curb and contain them. In *The Dead Zone*, an ordinary smalltown teacher discovers that he has the gift of foretelling the future and the means to avert the end of the world.

At the very beginning of Cronenberg's career, in *Crimes of the Future*, he was flirting with the theme of evolu-

tion. At the end of the film, Adrian Tripod attempts not simply to make love to a pre-pubertal girl, too young to have been afflicted with Rouge's Malady, but actually to merge with her with a view to creating a new third sex that would be immune from the disease. And as recently as *The Fly*, Cronenberg was still exploring the idea of mutation. Whereas in the original Vincent Price movie of the same name, the accident in the transporter simply resulted in a fly's head being grafted on to a man's body (and vice versa), in Cronenberg's version Seth Brundle ceases to exist as a human being and is transformed first into Brundlefly and finally into a hideous fusion of fly and machine.

In *Videodrome*, a man's stomach mysteriously develops a yawning hole into which a pornographic video cassette is inserted and the man is turned into 'new flesh'—neither wholly human nor wholly tape, but partly both. In the video age, it seems, we are what we watch. And in *Scanners* the tremendous mental duel between Darryl Revok and his brother Cameron Vale, in which each attempts to blow the other's mind, ends with a complete fusion of their personalities. We hear the voice of the virtuous Cameron Vale and, as he turns towards the camera, we see the face of the evil Darryl Revok. Who, in the end, has prevailed? Cronenberg leaves the question tantalisingly open and, with it, the future of the human race.

Scanners, in which the two leading characters turn out to be brothers, was made in 1980 and can now be seen as a companion piece to Cronenberg's latest film, *Dead Ringers*, which also focuses on brothers, this time twins. Elliot and Beverly Mantle, both played by Jeremy Irons, are world-famous gynaecologists with a highly profitable practice in Toronto but otherwise, on the face of it, little in common but their looks. Elliot is the dashing playboy, Beverly the stay-at-home bookworm. Yet underneath, they are interchangeable. They even share their women, Elliot romancing them so that shy Beverly can then impersonate him and move in. When Beverly becomes addicted to drugs, it is the 'irresponsible' Elliot who takes charge to save him.

The two brothers mirror each other's lives and, as the film develops, the traits that at first seem to divide them melt away so that at the end it is hard to tell them apart. They have become, as it were, one flesh—more like marriage partners, in fact, than just siblings. Cronenberg stresses this analogy. Within the partnership, he points out, 'specific things are assigned to each of them. Elliot is the worker, the flamboyant male, while Beverly is the cook. (Beverly, after all, is both a man's and a girl's name.) But despite the fact that they have divided up the work in this way, Elliot is just as vulnerable as Beverly.'

In trying to cure Beverly of drug addiction, Elliot becomes hooked himself and both decline in parallel into

infantilism and madness. Though they are not themselves 'Siamese' twins, they function as if they were and the film ends with a terrifying scene in which Beverly dismembers his brother, with his consent, in an attempt to sever the (actually non-existent) physical bonds that bind them. It is a kind of suicide pact—a *Liebestod*, if you like—and, in a funny way, one of Cronenberg's least pessimistic endings (although he would argue that none of his endings is pessimistic).

The story of the Mantle twins interlocks in the film with that of an actress, Claire Niveau, with whom they are both involved personally and professionally. Cronenberg may insist that his 'names' mean nothing, but common-sense says otherwise. What, after all, is a mantle but a cloak that conceals something? In this case that the twins need only each other to complete their lives. (In the book from which the story is taken they do have a meaningless name—plain Ross.) And Niveau, remember, is a French word which doesn't just mean level but level-pegging—on a par with, as in *au niveau de quelqu'un*.

The fact is that Claire Niveau is just as unusual as the brothers. She enters the story from the outset as a quirk of nature—as a trifurcate, a woman with three cervixes. Bifurcates, though not common, are a familiar concept in medical circles, but trifurcates, says Cronenberg, belong more to the realms of hypothesis. With three openings to the womb, Claire Niveau is one of Cronenberg's classic evolutionary oddities. She is a freak driven between twin brothers who are themselves, by definition, abnormal and she represents a threat to their relationship.

In comparison with *The Fly*, *Dead Ringers* is fairly restrained. The visceral element common to most Cronenberg films is confined to a dream sequence in which Claire fantasises that she is sleeping in the same bed as the brothers, who are joined at the stomach like Siamese twins. She separates them gorily by chewing through the flesh that joins them. The most gruesome feature of the film, however, lies not in what is shown but in what the brain imagines for itself. To perform a complex operation, Beverly has to design and commission a range of special gynaecological instruments for treating 'mutant' women. Laid out on the trolley, they prove to be the stuff of nightmares—huge, clawlike clamps, scalpels like Freddy Krueger's knife-nails and some nameless and repellent implement that is itself a dead ringer for the noxious parasite that wriggled out of the plughole in *Shivers*.

Beneath the sombre surface, *Dead Ringers* has its share of questionable (not to say sick) humour. Cronenberg has always had a taste for *outré* dialogue, often with blatantly sexual (not to say sexist) overtones. *Dead Ringers* is full of it. Suspecting that Claire is using them to obtain prescriptions for drugs, Elliot tells Beverly that 'she's heard it makes sex come on like Nagasaki.' And

he advises Beverly to take her out or else he will and 'do terrible things to her.' 'What sort of terrible things?' asks Beverly, warming to the idea, and we cut at once to a scene that can only be described as surgical bondage. Most outrageous of all is a scene set in Beverly's clinic where he asks a patient whether she finds intercourse painful and, on being told that she does, asks, 'What, exactly, did you have intercourse with? I once heard of someone who had it with a Labrador and I just wondered...'. Feminists won't forgive him in a hurry for that.

Dead Ringers is cod medicine. Cronenberg has had no medical training. Indeed, for a director who has made such a speciality of things scientific, he has had remarkably little formal grounding in the field. At the University of Toronto, where he began a general science course in 1963, he switched after a year to English and graduated in that faculty four years later.

But he retained a keen interest in the life sciences, and of this particular story, very loosely adapted from the novel *Twins* by Bari Wood and Jack Geasland, he says, 'I was interested in separating out the environmental from the genetic factors. Recent research on twins, notably in Minneapolis [itself a twin city, with St Paul, and the home of the Minnesota Twins] suggests that a great deal in their character is genetically pre-determined. Twins who have been separated at birth and who meet at the age of thirty-five turn out to have the same job, wives with the same name and the same car. And it seems also that things like obedience to authority and the ability to be swept up by music are genetic characteristics. That's why in *Dead Ringers* I don't show the parents of the twins, because I am trying to suggest that, as in a classical Greek tragedy, their lives are pre-determined.'

Another theme Cronenberg tackles in the film is the nature and limits of aesthetics. Half jokingly, Elliot says

that there should be beauty contests for the inside of the body, too—'best spleen, and so on'. But Cronenberg is dead serious. 'We've not devised an aesthetic for the inside of the body any more than we have developed an aesthetic of disease. Most people are disgusted—like when they watch an insect transform itself. But if you develop an aesthetic for it, it ceases to be ugly. I'm trying to force the audience to change its aesthetic sense just as the characters in my films do.'

This is particularly true of *The Fly*, where, in the course of the film, Seth Brundle is steadily transformed from nice, wholesome Jeff Goldblum into an insect sans teeth, sans ears, sans fingernails, sans everything, and with a habit (repugnant in a man, normal for a fly) of vomiting over its food before ingesting it. Few have found that spectacle particularly aesthetic.

Many, in fact, saw *The Fly* as a metaphor for AIDS—the progressive disintegration of the body under the onslaught of an irreversible disease. Cronenberg himself is sceptical about this. 'It's true that if you have done your job right, the film is going to suggest all sorts of things to people. But for my part I saw *The Fly* as a metaphor for ageing. In time we all turn into monsters of one kind or another, and I was interested in this case to see how Brundle would deal with the change. At first he despairs, looks in the mirror and says I am dying, but eventually he comes to terms with it.'

'To me,' says Cronenberg, 'the centre of everything is the human body. I keep returning to this very physical element of life and I'm also fascinated by the way human beings alter everything and accept nothing as given. We are constantly changing our bodies and this leads me instinctively towards the biological sciences. I'm interested in the way we have taken our own evolution into our hands. Darwin's theory of evolution by mutation had a serious flaw, because he never considered the possibility of evolution by disease—the idea

that some diseases might amount to a superior strain of the species. In my films there is an attempt by some of the characters to see their diseases as metamorphoses.'

The theme of mutation is to some extent soft-pedalled in *Dead Ringers*, which lacks most of the sci-fi overtones of Cronenberg's earlier work. Its characters and plot are more realistic and it is the most human of his pictures since *The Dead Zone*, which was his most convincing and restrained work to date. Oddly enough (or perhaps not so oddly), *The Dead Zone* is also the only film for which Cronenberg did not write the script. Jeffrey Boam wrote it from the unlikely source of a novel by Stephen King. It has real characters, with real homes and real names—simple ones like Johnny Smith and Sarah Bracknell. Cronenberg responded to it because, as a Canadian, he felt in tune with the simple, rural people in the story's New England setting. It was an opportunity to approach the kind of themes that interested him from another angle.

The Dead Zone rings true, not least because of the fine performances from Christopher Walken, Brooke Adams and Martin Sheen (as the would-be presidential candidate who sees it as his destiny to launch the missiles that will start the Third World War). And the movie raises intriguing questions about whether there are limits to the sanctity of human life. What would you have done to Hitler in the 1930s, for instance, if you knew then what you know now? *Dead Ringers* is not quite in that league. There is a jokiness about it that militates against it in some scenes, but like *The Dead Zone* it is one of Cronenberg's best acted films, with sterling work from Geneviève Bujold as well as Jeremy Irons. It is a piece of work that asks to be taken seriously.

Cronenberg's next? It might be *The Naked Lunch* for Jeremy Thomas, but talks are only at a preliminary stage. Best not to count too many evolutionary chickens. ■

Left: *Videodrome*, David Cronenberg probes for a video cassette. Right: *Dead Ringers*, Geneviève Bujold.



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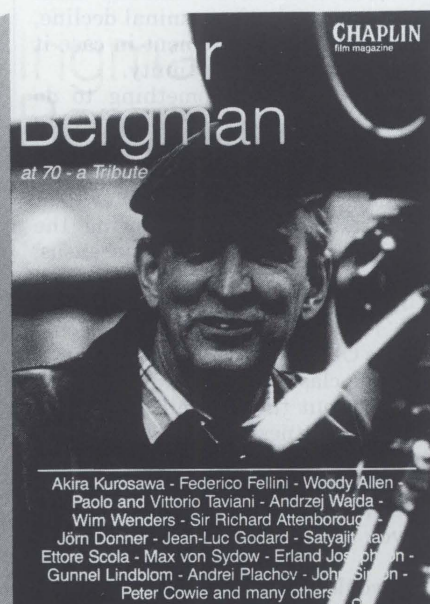
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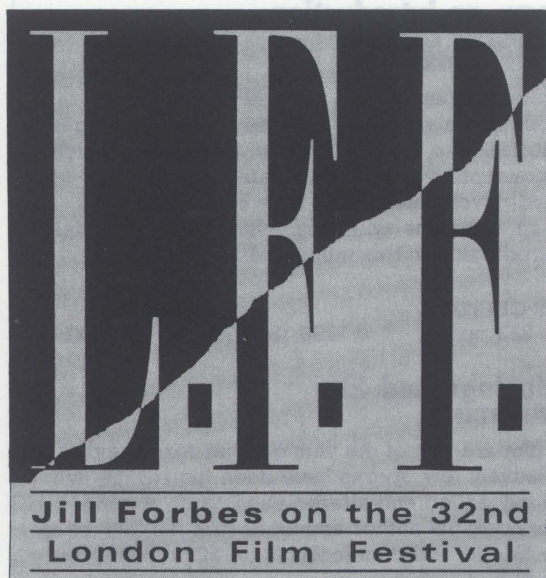
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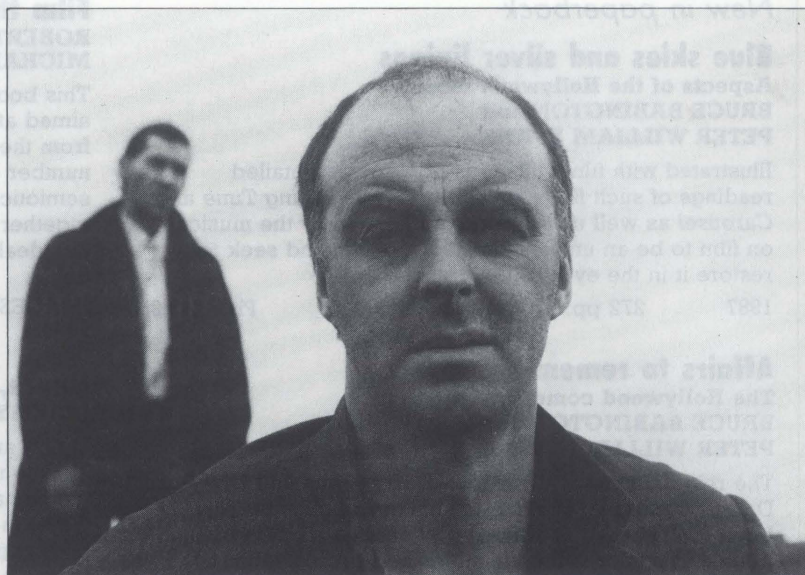
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Jill Forbes on the 32nd London Film Festival



The Return: Tony Guilfoyle.

The 1988 London Film Festival inspired me with the awe I sometimes feel in Chinese restaurants where the menu contains so much choice that I fall back on those great British staples, the spring roll, sweet and sour pork and fried rice. To begin with, then, the comfortably British. The great theme of our cinema in recent years (in Frears, Greenaway, Newell and many others) has been the state of the nation. Why this should be so is not altogether easy to explain. It must derive partly from the determination of film-makers, obliged to seek work in an industry until recently in apparently terminal decline, to make a political statement in case it should be their last opportunity.

It must also have something to do with the national dislike of expressing emotions, the feeling that psychological investigation is somehow embarrassing while the denunciation of social evils at least has the chance of allowing the film-maker to command a consensus; and in its patronising aspects it can undoubtedly be traced back through British tv in the 1960s to Free Cinema and Mass Observation, to the position of the middle-class artist discovering the 'real' world out there in all its squalor and unpleasantness, holding a mirror up to a different life for the inspection by other privileged members of society. If you can't make cinema for the people then you can at least make it about them.

This would naturally be impossible in a country in which class distinctions were not reformulated every so often so as to ensure a continuing sense of otherness and exclusion among some sections of society—a fact that is movingly demonstrated both in Mike Leigh's *High Hopes* and Phil Mulloy's *The Return*. Leigh, whose film might well be subtitled 'Thatcherism and semiotics', has understood more clearly than the Labour Party that these days politics is about lifestyles, hence the juxtaposition of that of the sympathetic, caring Cyril and Shirley, who live in a council flat,

smoke dope and support CND, with Cyril's nouveau riche sister and garage-owning brother-in-law in some mock-Tudor outlying suburb, and with yuppie wine-merchant Rupert who, with Laetitia, lives in a gentrified Victorian terrace a stone's throw from Cyril and Shirley's flat but, more important, next door to Cyril's old Mum, the only remaining council-house dweller in the street.

What this film cleverly suggests is that the emblem of Thatcherism is the transformation of London not so much because the property boom has permitted extraordinary capital accumulation, though it has, as because the notion of value has turned out, as semiotics teaches, to be extremely mobile. After all, no one would thank Mrs Thatcher if their houses returned to Victorian values, so when Laetitia asks Cyril's old Mum why she doesn't do up her house and sell it on, she is only pointing up the fact that contiguity determines value rather than any inherent property. The points of view in *High Hopes*—hence its title perhaps—are from the top of the block of council flats and from Marx's grave in Highgate Cemetery, both of which offer a commanding view of the City, and from the elevator on the side of the Lloyd's Building in which the hapless Cyril travels up and down at the whim of the messenger service which employs him.

Like Cyril, the protagonist of *The Return*, Rory, is a marginal, and once again the Lloyd's Building is used to emphasise his exclusion. But where Mike Leigh has turned to postmodernism to explain the world, Phil Mulloy has gone to Freud. This is both Rory-the-immigrant's return to Ireland and the return of what he has repressed about his mother, father, brother and ultimately, his Irishness. If anything, Rory is worse housed than Cyril and Shirley, being the last remaining tenant in a house the landlord wants to develop, but this is seen as related to the fact that he is Irish. Rory is refusing

to be expropriated, even though the cost is power cuts and boarded-up doors, and an early image which shows him taking a bath by candlelight turns out, as we proceed through a series of flashbacks or perhaps fantasies, to be one of a number of little deaths by drowning.

Rory wishes to hold on to what he is and what he has, his guilt at having failed to attend his father's deathbed, his wish to kill his brother, his love for his mother, though this ruins the present for him. Mulloy suggests that this kind of perversity is peculiarly Irish, for the way in which the Irish have been most dispossessed is in the translation of peasant boys from Co Kerry to be the labourers in English cities, so that Rory's remembered rural origins take on a magical glow, recalling Mulloy's earlier film *In the Forest* in which the 'country' had a similar atavistic significance.

If these two films succeed in saying something about present times, it is difficult to know what to make of Jim 'Jewel in the Crown' O'Brien's *The Dressmaker*, another film about Victorian values which ends up being nostalgic for what it ostensibly criticises. The film is adapted from a Beryl Bainbridge story set in wartime Liverpool, and it is the tale of how 17-year-old Rita, the local butcher's daughter who has been brought up by his sister since her mother's death, falls in love with a GI and is ditched by him because she doesn't know how to 'enjoy herself'. The reason she does not, it is suggested, is because the elder of the aunts subscribes to a code of morality upheld by the stern matriarch whose photo hangs in pride of place in the sitting-room. Those were the good old days! However, an interesting melodramatic twist now dictates that the younger of the aunts goes to bed with the GI and is discovered accidentally by her sister, who assaults him, pushes him down the stairs and kills him.

If the film had been devoted to the consequences of this or, alternatively, if



The Dressmaker: Billie Whitelaw.



It's Happening Tomorrow.

it had attempted to explore Rita's emotions without the initial prejudice about Victorian morality, it would have been more compelling. For as other recent films such as *Hope and Glory* have shown, it is not easy to recreate this period without being sentimental or self-indulgent and Liverpool, because of its history and crisis, particularly lends itself to this mode. Regrettably, much of the failure of a film which boasts John McGrath as its writer and the sublime Joan Plowright and Billie Whitelaw as the aunts, has to be attributed to the director, who turns a wonderful idea into *Coronation Street* on a bad day. Alas for Jim O'Brien, *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* has surely said the last word about Liverpool and that period for some considerable time to come.

The Victorian period in Italy, of course, bore little resemblance to our own except in its enthusiasm for ideas. While the British constructed dark, satanic mills, the Italians—though as a nation they did not yet exist—were busy pursuing the Enlightenment to its logical conclusions. This, at any rate, is the idea which underpins Daniele Luchetti's witty film *It's Happening Tomorrow*. This is a new kind of spaghetti Western consisting in the picaresque adventures of two cowherds, complete with floppy hats and straws, who are forced to flee their village after a well-intentioned but bungled hold-up to assist a friend who is ill, and are half-heartedly pursued by the son of their employer the local landowner, who would far rather stay at home writing an erudite treatise, into the bandit-infested Maremma district.

There they encounter a faded aristocrat, who has hired as tutor to his idiot son a priest who wishes to use the cowherds to settle by empirical methods the vexed question of whether breeding and intelligence are innate or acquired. One of them therefore stays behind to be educated in letters and in manners and to fall in love with the daughter of the house, while the other pursues his

wanderings and ends up in a Fourierist community. This peripatetic existence comes to an end, fittingly, when the brothers meet up by chance, are forced again to flee from the law and, to save their lives, embark on a boat carrying supporters of unification crying 'Viva Mazzini'. *It's Happening Tomorrow* is a sort of latter day *Candide* in which the film-maker is Pangloss manipulating the clichés of film genre, period and national characteristics so that their absurdities become apparent.

Once safely on the high road of European art cinema, the viewer can measure Luchetti's talent and confidence by comparing *It's Happening Tomorrow* with Manoel de Oliveira's *The Cannibals*, which is equally poised, witty and sophisticated in its range of references. But there the comparisons stop, because Oliveira is a director with a long career behind him who can, within limits, expect a certain complicity from his audience. This is fortunate, since the film is a narrative sung to a violin accompaniment which is a little hard to take at first. However, without this distancing device what starts out as a story in the Balzac mode and ends up as Buñuel, with the aristocratic protagonists hungrily devouring morsels of each other's flesh, would have looked like naturalism that had misfired and would certainly not have been comic. This is a film which, paradoxically, would be better shown on TV than released theatrically, since it will appeal to the scattered audience of those who like their cinema to stimulate the ear and mind as well as the eye. On the other hand, it is exactly the kind of film that should figure in a festival.

The same is true of Başar Sabuncu's *Impromptu*, billed as the movie which will change your view of the Turkish cinema. It is true that it is a social comedy, of which we see few from Turkey here, but though the social conventions are obviously not those of Western Europe, it is distinguished above all by being the *mise en scène* of a brilliant

idea. A man and a woman are summoned to the mortuary to identify the bodies of two lovers who were killed together in a car crash and who happen to be their spouses. This is the first each of them knew of the affair. Thus while the police hand over the personal effects of the deceased couple, the survivors are left to come to terms with death and betrayal simultaneously. They go their separate ways but as each of them tries to reconstruct the partner's secret life from the odd trace left behind they keep bumping into each other—at the flat in the red light district that the pair had rented, at the restaurant they frequented, at their places of work. Meanwhile, bereavement has once again given their families a role: the woman's sister-in-law instantly tries to marry her off; the man's mother arrives to cook and iron his shirts, and their officiousness pushes this odd and impromptu couple into themselves playing through a relationship of courtship, romance and married life. This film is both comic and cruel, a brilliant observation of life and a portrayal of the way individuals try to cope with jealousy and loss.

Still in the art film section, Max Von Sydow's first film as director, *Katinka*, appears to conform to the conventional idea of a Scandinavian movie quite as much as *Impromptu* breaks with that of a Turkish film. A small village in Denmark a century or so ago, the stationmaster's consumptive wife Katinka, who is loved by the new factor who arrives fresh from a broken engagement in another town and causes a flutter in a community where there are too many unmarried women. Many steam trains come and go, summer picnics succeed winter singsongs, the women marry, leave for the town, become embittered or, as in the case of Katinka, die slowly, according to a fatality inscribed in the social conventions of the period. It's all a far cry from the bleak, windswept Denmark of Gabriel Axel, or indeed of Bille August



The House on Trubnaya.



Hôtel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie.

who, with *Twist and Shout*, was to my mind the most interesting newcomer to Danish film-making.

However, the greatest mystery is provided by the selection of French films in the festival. On the one hand, there is Catherine Breillat's interesting *36 Fillette* (the somewhat catchpenny English title is *Virgin*), a hard-hitting study of the sexuality of an adolescent girl. On the other hand, the obvious companion piece, Agnès Varda's *Kung Fu Master*, in which a 40-year-old woman falls in love with a 14-year-old boy, was absent. Is this meat too strong for our taste or do the distributors have other plans?

What is sure to be a hit, but for all the wrong reasons, is Claude Sautet's *A Few Days with Me*—the wrong reasons being that in this film Sandrine Bonnaire does not play a character but plays the screen persona 'Sandrine Bonnaire' as you have seen her in Pialat's films. She is the semi-employed teenager living with a bunch of friends in similar circumstances in Limoges. The owner of a national supermarket chain comes to look over the Limoges branch which has been losing money, sees Francine/Sandrine, who is working as a maid for the wife of the branch manager, falls in love with her and decides to set up house in town. His money and his novel approach to life, in particular a total absence of the jealousy from which all Sandrine's other boyfriends suffer, plays havoc with the relations among this group of people, and events end tragically with the murder of one of them for which he takes the blame.

This film, therefore, is partly about an extremely rich young man expiating his privileges. But it is also about Sandrine Bonnaire enacting the wild untutored genius. Agnès Varda (again!) has shown however that given the right vehicle, such as *Sans toit ni loi*, she can be a wonderful actress, which is more than she is allowed to be here. It is an odd subject for Sautet to choose, since he has previously been best known for his thrillers, and indeed the portrayal of

the semi-underworld to which many of Sandrine's friends belong is much more convincingly done than the portrayal of upper-class life, which is caricatured to the point of being incredible.

As has been the case for the last few years, the stars of the 1988 Festival were not new films but the re-releases from the archive. Carl Davis provided a new score for Griffith's *Intolerance* which was obviously as good as your opinion of his music. The film, of course, is superb. In Eisenstein year, and for the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary, visitors to the Hayward exhibition could also see a newly restored *October* accompanied by Meisel's original music. Another fiftieth anniversary, this time of the International Federation of Film Archives, gave us John Ford's *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*; and as a tribute to Jacques Ledoux, who until his recent death was the curator of the Belgian Cinémathèque, we were offered Boris Barnet's *The House on Trubnaya*.

Ledoux was almost as legendary a figure as Henri Langlois in his time, and had the same antipathy towards writing information down. He was also, as John Gillett reminded us in his introduction, particularly fond of this wonderful comedy about the adventures of a peasant girl who comes to Moscow, gets taken on as a servant to a hairdresser and his wife, joins the trade union, stars in the union club's performance of the 'Storming of the Bastille', and, for a brief moment of confusion, is believed to have been elected to the city Soviet, thus causing all her neighbours to clean up the block of flats for a reception and her employers to enjoy a brief moment of glory. Barnet (he apparently owed his surname to an English ancestor) was a pupil of Kuleshov, and the two directors share an outlook on the world which is simultaneously ironic and affectionate as well as an extraordinary capacity for visual inventiveness. They are less influenced by slapstick and music hall than their American contemporaries, their comedy

is more social and much more dependent on the resources of the camera.

For example, one of the most famous scenes in *Trubnaya* is where Paranyha is chasing her duck through the Moscow streets and contrives to bring a tram to a halt. The driver leaps out and the frame freezes. The film is then run backwards as the title informs us we need a flashback in order to understand what she was doing there in the first place! On the other hand, the subject matter of the film, the notion that the daily interactions of ordinary people in a block of flats might be interesting, the way that the camera moves calmly up and down the stairwell showing the tenants about their business, is obviously something that other great democratic cinema across the Atlantic matched for a period. I am thinking, in particular, of King Vidor's *The Crowd*, which is contemporary with *The House on Trubnaya*. It is inspiring to see such films and also a little depressing, for they remind us how far we have gone back since then.

Finally, for my money, the only great new film in the Festival was Marcel Ophuls' *Hôtel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*. This is not because of the subject, although that is horrific enough, nor because it breaks new ground visually (on the contrary, it consists mainly in a series of interviews) but it explodes the conventions of genre by being so long and single-minded, and in so doing forces us to attend, much in the way *Intolerance* does, for longer than we are usually prepared to do. In this way it is a figure of Ophuls' determination to make the film and of the extraordinary ramifications of Barbie's career which stretched, in its influence, across two continents. Though it will undoubtedly be shown on television, it will suffer from being segmented since this will diminish the epic proportions which, perhaps ironically, only German films such as *Heimat* or *Berlin Alexanderplatz* have achieved in recent years. A tour de force. ■

ON THE WING

BIRD

Bird (Warner Bros) may be the opportunity that Clint Eastwood has been seeking for a long time to get away from himself. He has tackled this kind of subject before, and played the doomed performer himself. In the 1982 *Honkytonk Man*, he was a drunk and tubercular country singer (as well as drink and drugs, Charlie Parker is afflicted with ulcers) who finally keeps his date with destiny in Nashville, croaks through the recording of a lifetime, and dies. Although the film held out the sentimental promise that he would live on through his songs, Eastwood was so unsentimental about his character that in a way he nullified the film. Not only was Red Stovall destroying himself and his talent, it was implied, but in a peculiar way he was unsuited to life—passive, put-upon by others, destiny's buffoon, he was a character conceived so negatively that the film could not advance in any direction around him. From this petrified star portrait one might deduce Eastwood's negative feelings towards his own stardom, a kind of heroic masochism about the business of being a hero which has emerged in a clever strain of self-mockery in his films, led him to cast himself more than once as a literal wraith, but also produced self-immobilising features like *Honkytonk Man*.

Bird has released him from thrall to that persona, and although the subject is as death-bound as, say *High Plains Drifter* or *Pale Rider*, it gives the impression of being his most vivacious film. What may have been released is a generosity towards his other characters, a democratic spirit which in his films with himself as star was in fact dependent on Eastwood isolating, almost disdaining, his own undemocratic, macho character, and which resulted in a kind of petrified populism. Here all the characters are 'other'—the black jazzmen, and pre-eminently alto sax player Charlie Parker (Forest Whitaker), who created the bebop revolution of the 40s, and who in the view of one Parker biographer began consciously to develop their music as an art rather than just something to dance to. Eastwood's act of sympathetic identification with his subject, from a subtle, allusive script by Joel Oliansky, is such that it may not be necessary to talk about *Bird* as an Eastwood film, but as a superior, intelligent example of the disreputable musical bio-pic.

In this respect, the film has a musical movement, casting at will (and sometimes quite wilfully) back and forth through time in order to piece together the harmonies as well as the self-destructiveness of Parker's life, but it is not really 'about' his music. Musicians might (and apparently have) objected to



Bird: Forest Whitaker (Charlie Parker).

its treatment, with original Parker recordings 'cleaned up' electronically and new backings added, and there is one perverse time warp when the young Parker is shown trying out, disastrously, in Kansas City in 1936 on a song ('Cherokee') which hadn't been composed yet. The film does not go into the development of bebop, the fusion of the Kansas City style of Parker and Dizzy Gillespie with the faster jazz of New York City, and only towards the end does Parker reflect on his own style, his discovery in 1939 of a way of extending chord changes (on 'Cherokee' in fact). The dialogue in the film at this point is very close to Parker's own statements ('I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I'd been hearing'). Also scrupulously recreated is the anguished series of telegrams that Parker sent from California to his common-law wife Chan Richardson (Diane Venora) on the death of their daughter, and apparently even the tv show that Parker was watching when he succumbed, at thirty-four, to heart attack, pneumonia and cirrhosis.

What the film pulls off is the difficult fusion of this kind of accuracy with larger 'truths' which are no respecter of accuracy. The film is contained within the last few months of Parker's life, beginning with his attempted suicide by drinking iodine in September 1954, and his brief spell in Bellevue hospital, and ending with his fatal collapse in March 1955. Within this it flashes back to the beginning of his relationship with Chan, their emotional volatility and toing and froing, the tensions caused by Parker's drug abuse and infidelities, which are used to reflect an emotional truth about his music. This was also marked by volatility, a creative in-

stability that made it possible for Parker to be endlessly inventive and musically all-inclusive (one clue to the thing he'd been hearing, and trying to play, is supplied by his line in the film to the effect that if you could hear every sound in the world, you'd go crazy). Within Chan's flashback, there is another from the point of view of Buster Franklin (Keith David), the only outright fictional character, a composite perhaps of several jazzmen, who remembers Parker trying out as a teenager in Kansas City, and the famous incident when drummer Jo Jones, irritated when he took off in solo flight, tossed his cymbal at Parker's feet.

The flight of that cymbal is reprised throughout the film as a harbinger of doom, just as Franklin himself becomes an ominously over-arching character. After the dismay of his discovery that Parker has, by 1943, turned himself into the virtuoso of New York's 52nd Street (whereupon he tosses his own saxophone in the river), Franklin reappears towards the end of Parker's life, having glitteringly reincarnated himself as the doyen of the new rock 'n' roll sensation. Franklin might represent several figures in Parker's early life (Lester Young; band leader Buster Smith) who all functioned in some way as his mentor. But Franklin is no mentor; he is more like the larger-than-life villains whom Eastwood must face in his Westerns to prove his superhuman (or confirm his supernatural) status.

Other reminders of that world are the persistently penumbral photography of Jack N. Green, and the way the film is traced between almost-death and death achieved, with Parker transcending himself en route through his music. Facing himself in the mirror at the beginning, he quotes Omar Khayyam ('The bird of time has but a little way to

flutter, and the bird is on the wing...'), which might seem suspiciously high-toned, except that Parker's musical inclusiveness also included classical and modernist European confrères (the film shows a charming non-meeting with Stravinsky). In these respects, *Bird* does insist on being read as an Eastwood film, only this time the high plains drifter has transcended himself by identifying with, not someone supernatural but definitely other-worldly.

RICHARD COMBS

RETREAD TUCKER

All the articles about *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (UIP) and Francis Ford Coppola (the Ford has now mysteriously returned to his name) have said the same thing: after the years in the wilderness doing other people's projects, this is the film he really wanted to make.

The film is the true story of Preston Tucker's attempt in the postwar years to design a new car outside the Detroit automobile establishment dominated by the Big Three—Ford, General Motors and Chrysler. In 1948, with a small team, Tucker designed and built the Tucker Torpedo, a car which incorporated a host of innovations designed to improve efficiency or safety: rear-wheel drive, disc brakes, fuel injection, a pop-out windshield.

But only fifty of the cars were ever built. Fearful of the technological competition he was posing, the Big Three united to put him out of business, causing him to be brought to court on trumped-up charges of fraud. Not only was the business destroyed and the car a museum piece, but Tucker himself narrowly avoided going to gaol. The film concludes with a caption revealing that Tucker's innovations 'were slowly adapted by Detroit and are found in the cars you are driving now. Preston Tucker died of an illness six years after the trial, but his ideas will live forever.'

It's easy to see why Coppola was fascinated. The parallels of Tucker's story with Coppola's own attempted technological revolution are insistent throughout the film. More than that, *Tucker* takes him back to the era and the issues he explored so potently in the *Godfather* films. Like them, *Tucker* is set in the 40s at the height of American commercial expansion, the time when anything seemed possible. And like them, it shows the dark side that co-existed with the free enterprise myth.

The glowing design of *One from the Heart* was enticing but it was difficult to work out what it was for. But in *Tucker* there is a point to an America in which, through Vittorio Storaro's lens, everything looks newly manufactured.

Through the soda fountains and cars and massive factories, Coppola suggests an America of almost limitless hope and commercial plenitude. The country is like a pristine industrial Eden, which is gradually betrayed by the money men and politicians.

As this suggests, *Tucker* is something very different from the *Godfather* films. The profundity and paradox of the earlier family saga proceeded from Coppola's ability to do two things simultaneously: he could show the Corleone clan both as it saw itself and with cool, historical objectivity. He evoked the myth and punctured it at the same time.

At an early stage of planning, something similar must have been contemplated for *Tucker*. The workaday script of Arnold Schulman and David Seidler begins with a mysterious promotional film about the career of Preston Tucker (mysterious because we are not told when or why it is meant to have been made). The effect is rather like the deliberate brashness of the 'News on the March' cod-newsreel at the beginning of *Citizen Kane*. But in *Tucker* there is no contrast between the Tucker we see in promotional films and the Tucker we see elsewhere because in a sense the whole movie is a promotional exercise. A large proportion of the film is composed of montage sequences showing the exciting process of a car being designed and put together. And there's no sense of irony—we're just meant to share the enthusiasm of Coppola, self-proclaimed card-carrying member of the Tucker Automobile Club of America. It's as if *Citizen Kane* were to be remade by William Randolph Hearst.

The casting of Jeff Bridges as Preston Tucker is fascinatingly appropriate. Bridges has always been good at the

dynamics of failure in films like *The Last Picture Show*, *Bad Company* and *Fat City*. And he has probably also starred in more fascinating commercial failures than any other major actor. Bridges catches Tucker's good-natured, whirlwind enthusiasm, sweeping everyone before him. But the film asks us to take him entirely straight, as a combination of Andy Hardy and James Stewart.

The result is scenes I thought I would never see in an American movie again. Tucker proclaims that he and his small group of colleagues can put the car together themselves, right here in the barn. Later, when they have to manufacture four more cars to reach the quota of fifty which will prevent the government confiscating their plant, they do it again, crafting each car by hand. There is, lurking in the background, a fascinating story about a man who refused to recognise modern industrial imperatives, based on capital, the production line and mass labour.

The problem is that Coppola won't recognise it either. Despite its trappings, *Tucker* actually takes us back to a pre-industrial age. Coppola's Tucker doesn't want to raise finance and start a company. He wants to build a car in his workshop with the help of his extended family, consisting of a wonderful wife (Joan Allen), children, a gruff engineer (Frederic Forrest), a wily Japanese designer (Mako), and an accountant (Martin Landau) who is cynical at first but is then incorporated into the family as 'Uncle Abe'. This is a film about industry which is actually about a retreat from the ugly impersonal business world into the sanctuary of the family.

Coppola is revisiting an old movie genre and he uses its clichés to collude with Tucker's refusal to face reality.

Tucker: Jeff Bridges (Preston Tucker) and Joan Allen (Vera Tucker).



Another scene I thought was extinct was the courtroom climax where, when it comes to the case for the defence, the hero dispenses with the services of his lawyer and instead makes a sentimental and irrelevant speech to the jury. The jury members acquit him and even the judge gives a kindly, wry smile.

There are great things in the film. In one scene Tucker disregards a near-fatal accident involving a close friend, displaying for just a second the almost psychopathic obsession behind his dream. In another, by far the best in the picture, Tucker encounters Howard Hughes (eerily recreated by Dean

Stockwell) in the vast dark space of a hangar containing Hughes' own technological disaster, the biggest aircraft in the world, the *Spruce Goose*. Tucker is suddenly forced to confront his own dark side and fails to learn the lesson.

The same thing seems to have happened to Francis Ford Coppola. Tucker is a story of obsession, failure and betrayal that Coppola has tried to turn into a facile parable in praise of the American dreamer. The result is psychologically fascinating but deeply disheartening as the latest chapter of Coppola's cinematic career.

SEAN FRENCH

ANATOMY OF A MURDER A SHORT FILM ABOUT KILLING

Krzysztof Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Killing* (Cannon) is a work of visionary irony. The ironies set in with the very first images, as the titles roll: a dead rat in a puddle and a hanged cat dangling against the background of oppressively serried apartment blocks. Varsovians will recognise the irony that juxtaposes the dead creatures, emblems of an urban inferno, with blocks that in fact house many of Poland's best-known tv and film stars. The title itself secretes a lethal irony: this short film (it runs only 90 minutes) shows how lengthy and arduous is the process of doing a man to death. The time it takes will be marked excruciatingly by the slow progress of a bicycle across the yellow-lit horizon.

The ironies are not signs of authorial superiority, but the dissonances of tragedy. They strike in particular at a young lawyer, whose celebration of his graduation to the bar is pierced by a

sudden premonition that his future will not be as straightforward as he hopes. The murderer he will be called on to defend is already drinking in the same café. It is in the scenes in which the young murderer wanders about Warsaw, his own future still open, that Kieslowski's film is most remarkable. The boy walks through a world drained to sepia by filters, with colour appearing only at the centre of each image. This partial desaturation echoes the effect of the tinted band across the windscreen of the taxi whose owner the boy will kill. With its realistic equivalent—perhaps even origin—Kieslowski's formal device is never ornamental: instead it suggests, quasi-expressionistically, the closing down of the world inhabited by Jacek, whose name we will not learn until he has completed the murder—as if the act gives him a name by attaching him to a fate.

At the centre of these sepia images

there is virtually only one colour, red. During the film, Jacek pursues a series of unattainable girls dressed in red, the colour of life; and his pursuit leads naturally to the blossoming of another red, the blood that stains the taxi-driver's head. Jacek covers the head with a brown checkered blanket that, as it were, completes the desaturation of the world's colours by obliterating even red. The only girl with whom the boy is associated before the murder is one seen in a crumpled photograph. She wears a white communion dress and even before the end, when we learn she is Jacek's dead younger sister, we suspect her fate: the boy asks a shop assistant, given the print for enlargement, whether it's true that one can tell from a photograph if a person is still alive.

Ironies proliferate. The taxi-driver feeds a stray dog, unaware that a human outlaw will shortly kill him. During the murder, Jacek makes frantic efforts to halt the nightmarishly prolonged blast of the car horn, yet only a horse in a field looks round; but then, no sooner has the horn fallen silent, a passing train picks up its note. The taxi-driver is congratulated on his good luck by a man selling lottery tickets; Jacek, meanwhile, refuses to let a gypsy read his fortune as he enters the café in which Piotr, the lawyer, is having his palm read by his girlfriend. This world of diabolic coincidence is clearly one of the circles of hell.

Jacek's crime may seem motiveless, its inevitability simply the effect of Kieslowski's expressionist style and the remorseless accumulation of such details as the severed head that is the taxi-driver's good-luck charm, which presages his strangulation, and the dead cat. With his fluffy punk hair and leather jacket, Jacek stalks Warsaw like an edgy, existential angel of doom. Yet it is not just the stylistic tour de force which persuades us to accept the experience of this appallingly protracted murder.

Kieslowski in fact offers several possible explanations: the boy's need to obtain a car; the search by means of a murder, for which one knows the penalty is hanging, for a form of suicide that will not preclude burial in consecrated ground alongside one's beloved sister (a motif first suggested by Jacek's visit to a cinema at which *Wetherby* is playing); the country boy's need to assert himself in the city; youth's revenge on age. If none of these explanations is privileged, it is partly because Kieslowski wishes to allow for the essential mysteriousness of human action. Equally significant, however, is his sombre insistence on the typicality of the crime in a contemporary Poland in the process of becoming hell.

The consequences of Poland's economic decline are seen to include a slide towards gratuitous viciousness in human relations. The taxi-driver

A Short Film About Killing: Miroslaw Baka (the Boy).



deliberately leaves would-be passengers standing; Jacek informs others that his destination is the opposite of theirs: hostility is pervasive. In the midst of this darkness, Kieslowski locates hope in children and in the idealistic lawyer Piotr Balicki. Jacek flicks the dregs of coffee at a window through which two girls are watching him: their smiles transform his violence into play.

Piotr's defence of Jacek is useless: a daring cut excising everything between the recognition of the taxi and the judge's statement that the trial is closed. The lawyer's speech against the death penalty may be the best the judge has ever heard, but we are not shown it. This is partly because Piotr's role as a

secular priest, hearing Jacek's last words in prison, is more important to Kieslowski. But it is also because the director has his own argument against capital punishment, framed purely filmically. Murder and execution are horrifyingly indistinguishable. As the militiamen bundle the condemned man into the death chamber, knocking down the curtain, and the man tightening the noose shrieks instructions to his assistant, the hysteria echoes Jacek's realisation of the difficulty of killing a man. Is the law, which has violence at its heart, partly responsible for Jacek's crime? This is the final and most deadly irony of Kieslowski's film.

PAUL COATES



High Hopes: Ruth Sheen (Shirley), Edna Doré (Mrs Bender), Philip Davis (Cyril).

CLASSTROPHOBIA HIGH HOPES

High Hopes (Palace Pictures), Mike Leigh's first theatrically released feature since *Bleak Moments* in 1971, is even less plotted than is usual for this director. Set mostly around the King's Cross area of London, it examines the interconnected lives of seven characters: Cyril, a despatch rider, and his live-in companion Shirley; his widowed mother, Mrs Bender; his sister Valerie and her crassly entrepreneurial husband Martin; and his mother's next-door neighbours—frankly upper-crust rather than 'upwardly mobile' as the pressbook describes them—Rupert and Laetitia. And almost the only generator of narrative suspense is the long pivotal scene in which, having forgotten her keys, Mrs Bender finds herself locked out of her house.

What is the difference between Leigh's demystificatory essays in working-class culture and, say, Auberon Waugh's demystificatory essays about

working-class culture? This is what I propose. Where Leigh says to his, after all, predominantly middle-class audience: 'You think of yourselves as liberal but isn't it true, underneath, that you fear and despise the working classes?', what Waugh says is: 'You think of yourselves as liberal but isn't it true, underneath, that you fear and despise the working classes?'

On paper, as you will have noticed, there is no difference whatsoever, which is why Leigh has been censured, often by those who would seem to be his natural allies and champions, for a gratuitous and near-sadistic lack of generosity towards his working-class protagonists. The difference, in fact, is one of interpretation and insinuation. For Waugh it is the underlying anxieties, not the virtuously liberal ideals, that are the impulses to be trusted, nurtured and indulged without shame. For Leigh, by contrast, it is necessary, if

one is ever to exorcise it, that one confront head on one's deep-seated apprehension of sociocultural Otherness, and what his films do is force that confrontation upon us. And unlike the outwardly similar work of Alan Bennett (whose humour derives from the replacement of Wildean paradoxes by the platitudes of the educationally underprivileged), he does not trade in either parody or nostalgia.

If I have dwelt on this aspect of *High Hopes*, it is because, as always with Leigh, he just cannot get the other classes right. With their braying hahas, their crates of champers and the infantilism of their neo-, crypto- and pseudo-Brideshead sexuality, Rupert and Laetitia would appear to belong not merely to another class but to another genre. Even their names strike one as silly and overdetermined, anyone's off-the-top-of-the-head notion of how the other half tends to be christened; and when Laetitia makes passing mention of a certain Araminta de Winter (unless I misheard), there is a distinct and incongruous whiff of both Dumas père and fils. I must confess though, that these solecisms did not bother me a whit. From Alan Bridges to Piers Haggard, and from Charles Sturridge to the man who directs the Hovis ads, the British cinema is positively crawling with film-makers who have 'got' the ruling classes down to the last gaiter button, as they used to say, and I find it endearing and wholly to Leigh's credit that he has pitched his tent far from that particular mainstream.

Unfamiliarity with the idiom, moreover, does not prevent him from neatly impaling his upper-class characters on a host of revealing behavioural or verbal notations—such as Laetitia's expression of exquisitely pained forbearance when she realises that she will have to harbour the slightly ratty Mrs Bender under her gentrified roof until a set of spare keys can be fetched, her bracing 'Chop chop!' as the old woman totters up the steps and her airily callous, 'I'll show you where it is in a minute,' when she asks, with some urgency, to go to the toilet. ('Oh, you mean the lavatory.') But it has always been Leigh's peculiar genius to demonstrate that there is indeed a reality behind the baffling improbability of other people's lives, to bring even monstrous Otherness into intense and startling focus, to draw the tritest of human gestures out by the roots and shake them in our faces.

In *Grown-Ups*, for instance, he took an infuriatingly shrill and scatty young woman, the sort who is forever 'popping in for a cuppa', and by exposing the loneliness behind the stereotype showed us where she was coming from. In *Meantime* he made sense out of a skinhead. And a single shot in *High Hopes*—of old Mrs Bender on her front doorstep clutching her chest and gasping for

breath—conjured up (for me, at least) a lifetime of glimpsing such people in the street and wondering guiltily whether one ought to help or leave them be, whether they are having a heart attack or are just out of breath, and so on.

But the film has to be, and is, more than simply a cluster of beadyly observed vignettes of Thatcher's Britain: there is, at its centre, the story of Cyril and Shirley, one of the most poignantly loving couples (along with, in my lonely opinion, Sammy and Rosie) that our national cinema has produced.

Since the performances of Philip Davis and Ruth Sheen are beyond praise, there's no point in praising them. Suffice to say that the characters are alive and true to a hallucinatory degree, an *effet du réel* rendered all the more powerful by the fact that they are, unashamedly, unambiguously, the representatives of good, of good-humoured civic responsibility, of that sense of societal solidarity that, as we know, does not exist for Mrs Thatcher. Their responses to the needs of others recall those of Londoners in the Blitz. And

Cyril's reply to the sneeringly put question of what exactly it is he stands for—'I want everyone to have enough to eat'—is a noble reaffirmation of socialist priorities in an age of postmodernism, post-Fordism, neo-Marxism, all of them seductively revisionist strategies devised to make liberals forget that, no, not nearly everyone has enough to eat.

Cyril and Shirley both have and are the high hopes of Leigh's title, which is absolutely not ironic; and theirs is a story of grace under pressure.

GILBERT ADAIR

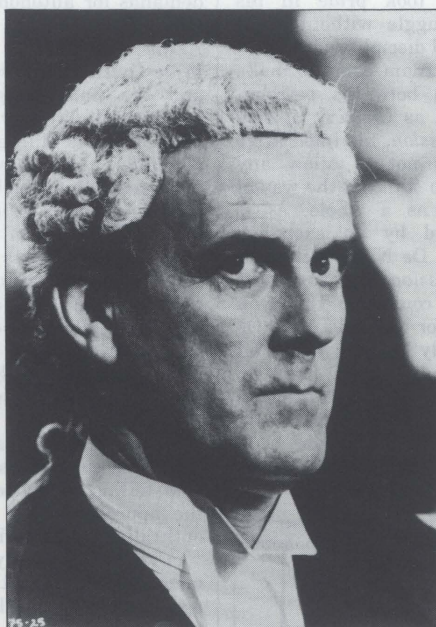
RETURN ENGAGEMENTS A FISH CALLED WANDA

After a jewel raid, a gang of crooks—four notably incompatible confederates—fall to double-crossing. One of them, the girl Wanda, good-looking and brimming with spirit, if not exactly honest, falls for the barrister, secretly tired of his wife, daughter and everything English and proper, assigned to defend the gang-leader shopped by the girl and her supposed partner, the American weapons man. An hour and three-quarters of misunderstanding and capering later, the girl, the barrister and the loot are on a jet to Rio. Not a new plot, exactly.

Why then has this modest British picture, *A Fish Called Wanda* (UIP), proved such a resounding success? MGM backed it, and like several other 'Monty Python' theatrical features it arrived in the UK with an established American reputation. Marketing, however, is only half the story. Video, I would guess, has played its part. Very few people under-25 who enjoy feature films have actually seen an Ealing comedy in the cinema: but chances are a great many of them know what an Ealing comedy is, and that—prehistoric though it must seem—it still works, particularly on video. No panning and scanning; no subtitles; pleasure increased with repeat viewings.

Wanda, as everyone now knows, was directed by Charles Crichton, the director of, in particular, *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951); and as everyone who has seen *Wanda* realises this memorable comeback is redolent of Ealing, in plot, pace, subject matter and black comedy. To those who appreciate Ealing comedy (which is to say all right-thinking people), watching the film is like chancing on a Hogarth sketch in grandmother's attic, clearly and unmistakably signed by the Master.

The four crooks are not led by Alec Guinness (though they could have been) and the loot isn't melted into golden Eiffel Towers. The echoes of *Lavender Hill*, however, come through clear but—and here's the trick—miraculously



John Cleese (Archie Leach).

unforced. This is an 80s comedy, its whimsy overlaid with acerbity: there's sex and the black comedy is spiced with real and, for some stomachs, disturbing violence. A small illustration of how Crichton and his co-creator John Cleese successfully melded past tradition with present imperatives is the assured introduction into the plot of a genuine postwar spiv. Tom Georgeson, the gang-leader, with his slightly hyperthyroid look, his pencil moustache rising in the middle to his nostrils and his fearless contempt for authority, is an unfazed time-traveller: he is the genuine article, for all his two dimensions, and all subsequent models are really only johnny-come-latelys.

The second element in *Wanda's* success also has to do with nostalgia. John Cleese retired as Basil Fawlty leaving his audience in Britain and the US pining for more. A serious man of several parts, Cleese has teased his admirers by limiting his return engagements. In *Wanda*, however, he gives full measure. The hotelier is no more, but the barrister, whom Cleese plays with a gangly and masterfully shell-shocked sincerity, has as equally trying, equally peremptory wife (Maria Aitken) and a job which requires him to play another

role with certain well-defined protocols to which by temperament he is fundamentally unsuited.

One sometimes wondered whether Basil might not at the end of some particularly trying day vamoose with Polly the maid. In *Wanda*, with Polly replaced by the equally solicitous though slightly more adoring Wanda (Jamie Lee Curtis), he finally makes his break for freedom. Alec Guinness at the end of *The Lavender Hill Mob*, as Charles Barr among others has noted, was of course led away in handcuffs, the rules of 1951 not permitting him to enjoy the fruits of his mischief.

Which brings us to the third ingredient of the present film's appeal: its tartness, its ability to make certain jokes that would have been impossible in this sort of picture even a few years ago. At one point, for instance, when Wanda is on the point of seducing the barrister, Archie Leach, in his own home while his wife is supposedly at the opera, but is of course on her way back, the irate weapons man Otto (Kevin Kline, a perfect over-energised foil to Cleese's languid Englishman) materialises and threatens with a scissor-motion behind his rival's back to emasculate poor Archie if matters go too far. An exemplary capping gag to a sequence screwed almost to breaking-point.

If *Wanda* has one fault, it is perhaps that it relishes its cruelty. The fourth member of the gang, Ken (Michael Palin), a meek individual with a stammer, an ideal runner for the spiv, keeps tropical fish which are, just before the climax in which he has his revenge, eaten alive by Otto, one by one, in order to extract from Ken, bound and tearful and choking on a pear stuffed into his mouth, an admission of the whereabouts of the loot. The film's running gag, furthermore, has Ken, the animal-lover, accidentally killing, one by one, three small dogs in a vain attempt to do his master's bidding by wiping out their owner. The old Ealing had a somewhat more delicate way with murder; nowadays, however, that particular sort of refinement is not at a premium—which is also why, maybe, *A Fish Called Wanda* has so exactly caught the tenor of the times.

JOHN PYM

THE PRODUCER

ENIGMA David Puttnam, The Story So Far . . .

by Andrew Yule
Mainstream/£14.95

'I think David joined the SDP,' said Alan Parker, 'because he thought it stood for Sir David Puttnam.' Andrew Yule's biography discovers an ambivalence within Britain's most famous living film producer very similar to the conflict at the top of his favourite political party: between a generous, open, self-doubting David, and a charming, manipulative, tough David. These 'two Davids' find cohabitation no easier than did their political counterparts.

The story of Puttnam's career is told from its origins in Southgate, London, to the zenith represented by *Chariots of Fire* and the nadir of his departure from Columbia Pictures. His strengths clearly lie in his talents as a producer: a negotiator 'tap-dancing' his way through sticky situations and an impresario of talent, who spotted the potential of previously untried directors such as Ridley Scott, Hugh Hudson, Roland Joffe and Alan

Parker himself. In the 1960s, Puttnam was a Paul McCartney look-alike who moved through advertising and photography into cinema. There, he served a by no means untroubled apprenticeship with films like *That'll Be the Day*, *Mahler*, and *Lisztomania*: 'My experience with Ken [Russell] was a learning process. I learned in that job what I would have had no other way of acquiring—that no producer can afford the luxury of respecting a director over-much . . . I am a very old-fashioned boy. I believe in the text, the script, the blueprint. Ken took pride in his ability to juggle without these fundamental disciplines.'

When Puttnam came to make films which bore his personal stamp, such as *Chariots of Fire* and *The Mission*, his imperative was always not to allow any individual to stand in the way of the project as a whole, as is demonstrated by an exchange with Robert De Niro when casting *The Mission*. Puttnam: 'I'm not totally convinced that you are right for the picture.' De Niro: 'Nobody has ever said that to me before, David. I'm an actor, and my feeling is that I'm right for anything that I really sincerely feel that I can do.'

Whatever his strengths as a

producer, Puttnam's career as a corporate executive has been less than happy. He was forced by his film-making commitments to spend a lot of time away from Goldcrest despite being a board-member. On this issue, Yule tends to take Puttnam's side, making clear the effects of the box-office failure of *Absolute Beginners* and *Revolution* on the company, while playing down the significance of *The Mission*'s poor performance in America.

Yule's narrative of Puttnam's involvement with Columbia covers familiar ground—his demands for autonomy, his run-ins with Ray Stark, producer of *Annie* and *Funny Lady*, and Mike Ovitz, the powerful agent, and the final merger of Columbia with Tri-Star. Yule adds little which is different from the accounts that have already appeared. While the book has an irritating habit of leaving conflicting accounts of events unresolved, it benefits immensely when Yule pursues one of these contradictions. He quotes verbatim a conversation he has with Puttnam over whether he was approached by Fay Vincent of Coca-Cola about the Columbia job, or vice-versa.

YULE: 'What Fay said specifically was that you said to him, "I'm telling everyone you made the approach"; and Fay wasn't enthralled with that idea.'

PUTTNAM: 'I really don't remember. I said that? Well, again, all of my early conversations with Fay . . . maybe I wanted to make it clear, to make it unambiguous, that's the only thing I can think—to avoid any ambiguity. I tell you what I might have said was, because the question's going to be asked, we did a rehearsal of a press conference, and what I may have said to Fay is that if the question gets asked "who approached who?" I want to make it unambiguously clear that you approached me, rather than say it was a conversation with our lawyers etc etc. I can imagine that.'

More light is thrown on Puttnam's character by this single exchange than by the book's many quotations from his friends, enemies, and colleagues. The exchange reveals the difficulty involved in trying to pin down Puttnam, or indeed any of the leading figures in the story. As Puttnam admitted in his interview with Tina Brown in the *Sunday Times* some months ago: 'Hollywood plays to your weaknesses. Whatever you are, it makes you more than you want to be. If you're a bit aggressive, it makes you more aggressive. If you're a bit deceitful it turns you into a liar.' Unfortunately, even after over 450 pages, one is left feeling that the true story of the

Columbia affair has still to be written.

However, Puttnam's attribution of a disputed statement to the scene of a press conference is more revealing than it appears. As a product of the 1960s media revolution, Puttnam has never underestimated the importance of publicity, especially in relation to his own activities. His symbolic position at the head of the British film industry (as distinct from his professional status as a producer) owes much to his outstanding self-presentational techniques. These could be seen at work early in his career, when his move to take up film-making was accompanied by the decision to grow a beard to give him the right image.

Puttnam's departure from Columbia after just over a year is seen by Yule as the almost inevitable outcome of the public statement that he would only stay with the company for three years. This self-imposed limit deprived Puttnam of the muscle he needed to deal with the likes of Ray Stark. The sturdy testimony of Bruce Robinson, writer of *The Killing Fields*, bears witness to this: 'There are only two types of animal who roam the Hollywood jungle. Those who do the fucking and those who get fucked. You just try to ensure you're the former for they'll shaft you in every orifice they can find, then they'll cut you open and fuck the wound. Of all people, David knew this. For years in Britain he's been the fucker, now he was certain to be the fuckee.'

It is odd that Andrew Yule has moved from writing about the Cannon film empire in *Hollywood A Go-Go* to a biography of Puttnam, the foremost British antagonist of the Golan/Globus duo. While *Enigma* has more coherence than the earlier book, perhaps due to the unifying figure of Puttnam himself, it still represents an uneven mixture of elements, none of them wholly satisfactory: biography, business history, film criticism, and the inside stories of the making of Puttnam's films.

No consideration is given to the social or cultural persona which Puttnam represents. It is easy to marvel at the way in which someone described by Alan Parker as 'a yobbo' has attained the status of Britain's leading quality film producer. It is more difficult to explain the power of Puttnam as a figure in the popular imagination—the fact that the idea of him moving into politics is far from ridiculous. By missing this point, Yule has allowed himself to be taken in by Puttnam's unquestionable charm. Whatever Puttnam's enigma consists of, it has certainly beguiled Andrew Yule.

ADAM BARKER

The Hitchcock Romance

Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films
Lesley Brill

Was Alfred Hitchcock a cynical trifler with his audience's emotions, as he liked to pretend? Or did his public persona conceal a profoundly humane artist? Most film commentators have let Hitchcock's self-assessment go unquestioned. Lesley Brill, however, presents another view—Hitchcock as a deeply conventional, thoughtful, and rather softhearted filmmaker, whose movies convey an affectionate, hopeful understanding of human nature and the redemptive possibilities of love. In an accessible study that speaks to all Hitchcock enthusiasts, as well as to film professionals, Brill discusses Hitchcock's work as a whole and examines in detail twenty-two of the films, from perennial favorites like *North by Northwest* to neglected masterpieces like *Rich and Strange*.

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MERCHANT WALLAH

HULLABALOO IN OLD JEYPORE

by Ismail Merchant
Viking/£14.95

If the definition of a movie producer—a definition applicable to at least ninety-five cases out of a hundred—is 'someone who will do everything in his power to avoid producing movies', then Ismail Merchant, who actually relishes his work, is not a movie producer. In *Hullabaloo in Old Jeypore*, his amusing, lively chronicle of the continuously agitated shoot of *The Deceivers*, he even cites with undisguised pride Ruth Praver Jhabvala's admission of concern (voiced in Channel 4's documentary, *The Wandering Company*) that his occasionally unorthodox financing practices might one day land him in prison. For Merchant, almost uniquely, movie producing would seem to be not so much a profession as a vocation.

The particular trouble with *The Deceivers*, unfortunately, was that neither Jhabvala nor James Ivory, who are less Merchant's collaborators than virtual extensions of himself, felt any affinity with the project; directors such as Marek Kaniévski and Stephen Frears, actors such as Christopher Reeve and Jeremy Irons, had meanwhile come and gone; and the definitive package of Nicholas Meyer and Pierce Brosnan represented (even if Merchant does not quite say this) a quintessential movie-production compromise. When it began to look, then, like a typical shoot—therefore untypical of MIP—Merchant's problems were compounded by the hullabaloo of his book's title, when the unit was harassed at every turn and Merchant found himself briefly under arrest, for filming scenes (notably of the banned suttee ceremony) 'derogatory to Hindu culture, religion and mythology.'

As anyone who knows him could have predicted, he emerged more or less unscathed from the rather absurd maelstrom (his account of which manages to strike a neat balance between a civic respect for the traditions of his ancestors and a mischievous glee at having foiled his adversaries) and whisked himself off to the States to commence work on Ivory's *Slaves of New York*. No doubt that film's problems were more in his line. For, as he sighs, when Ivory (co-opted for some second-unit work on *The Deceivers*) scrambles hotfoot from an unexpectedly temperamental tiger, 'If only he shot his films as quickly!'

GILBERT ADAIR

CHEQUES AND BALANCES

THE HOLLYWOOD STORY

by Joel W. Finler
Octopus/£14.95

HOLLYWOOD AND THE BOX OFFICE 1895-1986

by John Izod
Macmillan/£27, (paper/£9.95)

At a time when public perception of the cinema seems to be as much by way of the City pages as the gossip columns, here are two books, respectively coffee-table popular and low-key academic, which address themselves to the American film industry as an industrial institution. One comes chock-a-block with charts and diagrams... that, however, is the popular book, *The Hollywood Story*, which claims to offer 'Everything you always wanted to know about the American movie business but didn't know where to look.'

Movie business, note, and it is for a profusion of figures more than just of facts that Joel Finler's book affords particular fascination. Bracketed between a comprehensive introduction and an elaborate network of appendices, Finler offers rundowns on the fortunes, in all senses, of eight of the 'major' Hollywood studios. We learn near the beginning, for instance, that the average cost of a feature film in 1920 was \$60,000, or when adjusted for inflation to 1986, \$750,000; by 1986 itself, this figure has reached \$12m—which already, three years on, begins to look rather modest. The 1930 figure is \$375,000 (= \$4.1m), the 1940 one hardly higher at \$400,000 (\$4.4m). Against this background, it is striking to see how the takings of 1920s hits tended to put those of subsequent decades in the shade. Paramount's *The Covered Wagon* and *The Ten Commandments* (both 1923) each took more at the North American box office than any Paramount release of the 30s; and even at MGM a comparable situation prevailed, provided 1939 is taken as the cut-off point, *annus mirabilis* of *Gone With the Wind*.

Coming nearer to date, there are the stratospheric hits and misses of the recent past, the latter including such ventures as *Yes, Giorgio* (cost \$18m; domestic rental \$1m) or *King David* (\$22m; \$2.5m). By comparison, there is something rather heroic about the fact that during RKO's producing life, its greatest loss-maker was Dudley Nichols' fling at filming *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947; net loss \$2.3m). On the other hand, listings of box-office successes dampen easy nostalgia: Warners' biggest hit

of the 1940s was *This Is the Army*, and while the company's highest-grossing picture of the 1950s was *Giant*, runners-up included such dismal efforts as *The Sea Chase* and *Ocean's Eleven*.

None the less, the annotation of Hollywood history contained within what properly resembles a scrapbook goes beyond the sphere of economics. Scattered through the pages, one comes upon a photograph of Edith Head, the one costume designer everyone has heard of, attired in a fashion not notably stylish; 'Cubby' Broccoli of Bond renown, pictured in a stetson hat consuming a huge helping of spaghetti; a line-up of Warners' directors of the late 1920s (Alan Crosland, Ray Enright, et al), who as they flank their diminutive boss Darryl F. Zanuck bear a distinct resemblance to a gathering of those shady businessmen so frequently found in the studio's early sound successes.

And there is a splendidly lurid lobby card from *Flying Leathernecks* (1951), showing John Wayne jabbing Robert Ryan in the ribs and declaring in a dialogue bubble, 'You haven't got the guts to point your finger at a guy and say, Go get killed!' In this context, even some of the

statistical revelations—the percentage of United Artists releases of the 40s filmed in colour, for instance, was 0.4—start reassuringly to shade towards the surreal and hallucinogenic.

This latter dimension is mainly absent from *Hollywood and the Box Office*, whose tone tends towards the lecture theatre. John Izod, though, provides a skilful synthesis of several more specialist sources as he conducts us from the crucial establishment of the first film exchange in 1902, on via vertical integration and the labyrinthine economic strategies by which sound became a viable commodity, to wartime boom and assorted post-war upheavals. Some of this can be hard going, but there are intriguing sidelights: 'tie-in' novels, illustrated with film stills, were apparently being produced as early as 1914.

It is, however, in his last chapter, on the ramifications of the late-60s cash crisis, the role of the conglomerates and the grail of the mega-hit, that Izod gains most momentum. In 1977 the six top-grossing films accounted for fully one-third of us distributors' rentals, and, Izod asserts, the industry 'discovered that its success in raising new capital from the conglomerates meant that

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the event movie had become an essential part of its profit-making programme.' He goes on to argue convincingly the implications of this in terms of both audience profiles and marketing strategies, concluding with a downbeat note on the philosophy of the multiplex, where the decor is 'deliberately bland' and the sales area becomes the focus of attention, converting the movie theatre, as he puts it, from dream palace to retail outlet.

TIM PULLEINE

HORRORS

AMERICAN HORRORS Essays on the Modern American Horror Film

Edited by Gregory A. Waller
University of Illinois Press/
£30.75, (paper) £12.75

DARK ROMANCE Sex and Death in the Horror Film

by David J. Hogan
Equation/£7.99

DREADFUL PLEASURES An Anatomy of Modern Horror

by James B. Twitchell
Oxford University Press/£7.95

PLANKS OF REASON Essays on the Horror Film

Edited by Barry Keith Grant
Scarecrow Press/\$31, (paper)
\$17.50

Four weighty tomes, dripping with academic credentials, replete with subtitles. Two collections of essays by (mainly) American academics, dealing with (mainly) American horror movies, and two full-length studies of particular, and particularly sexual, aspects of the genre. Almost all the authors represented view the horror film as a closed genre, in and of itself apart from the rest of the cinema, and almost everyone takes a psychological approach, as if the films under discussion were irrational symptoms, unconnected with the political, economic, social or artistic make-up of the societies and film-makers which produced them. Even within these limitations there is much to think about, although one can't help but feel that *Dark Romance*, the least well-argued and structured of these books, gets closest to the scattershot appeal and importance of the genre.

The collections could almost be combined. Several writers appear in both, with Bruce F. Kawin contributing excellent studies concentrating on under-valued movies and J. P. Telotte psychobabbling around the subject in both books. *Planks of Reason* is mainly a reprint

anthology, and so should not be criticised for its failure to come up with a coherent 'solution' to the problem of horror. Included are such important essays as Bonnie Zimmerman's study of the lesbian vampire movie and Robin Wood's 'Introduction to the American Horror Film', both of which remain influential.

Too influential, in fact, to go unchallenged. Zimmerman was writing before *The Hunger*, but still managed to overlook the very interesting *Lemora—A Child's Tale of the Supernatural*, and should perhaps expand her outlook to take in the bisexual male vampire of *Fright Night*. While Wood's basic 'return of the repressed' formula for the horror film ('normality is threatened by the monster') has been allowed to pass into the halls of critical truism without really being tested. Wood's piece remains a brilliantly argued, disturbingly comprehensive overview of the currents of mid- to late-70s horror, but the genre is still changing, and approaches to it should be similarly flexible. As usual, it's the articles on obscure backwaters (Lester D. Friedman on the Jewish horror film) that stand out.

American Horrors reads better as a collection, although it too reprints much material. It deals with the last twenty years of American horror cinema, and selects pieces to cover all the sub-generic bases (down to including an essay by Waller himself on made-for-television horror films, perhaps the most overlooked category). It's notable that the book includes less unreadable material than *Planks of Reason*—compare R. H. W. Dillard and Robin Wood on *Night of the Living Dead* and *Eyes of a Stranger*, detailed, incisive, non-pompous, in Waller's book with the indigestible close analysis of *White Zombie* by Edward Lowry and Richard de Cordova in Grant's collection. And there is a comprehensive analysis of 'The Stalker Film, 1978-81' by Vera Diker and an essay by Charles Derry that serves as an update-cum-postscript for his excellent book-length study, *Dark Dreams*.

If there's a common flaw to all these pieces—and Twitchell's *Dreadful Pleasures* too—it is that when any academic sets out to write about horror film he sits down and watches the same ten films that the last academic did, hence the recurrence of familiar titles and the lack of the sort of interesting, untouted 'discovery' movies that crop up whenever devotees of the genre write.

In *Dark Romance*, David Hogan devotes a chapter to the films of Barbara Steele, and includes close studies of *Nightmare Castle* and *The Long Hair of*

Death. Hogan has seen *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Exorcist* and *Halloween* too and, by and large, knows the difference between quality and schlock. But in his chosen subject matter—the bizarre intersections of sex and death in the horror film—he finds that sometimes, although not always, the schlock is more telling than the quality. His essay on Steele is more interesting than his solid, familiar piece on Hitchcock, and yet his piece on Roger Corman, who was canny enough to include some well thought-out content even in his most marginal films, carries more weight than his confused attempt to come to grips with Edward D. Wood, about whom it is impossible to write without sounding like an idiot.

Dark Romance doesn't set out to prove anything, but serves usefully as a travelogue through the neurotic grey areas of horror, yet again suggesting that sex is at the root of all horror, which is perhaps only useful if one omits mention of all horror films—*Q, Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Duel*, *Night of the Living Dead*, to take four at random—in which sexuality is a peripheral or absent issue. Hogan is too clued-in to skip these films, but his thoughts also stray from the subject at hand when he comes to deal with them.

Sexuality is also central to *Dreadful Pleasures*, which doesn't confine itself to the cinema, covering theatre, literature and Art in general, and takes a quaintly high-flown approach to the classic *Famous Monsters of Filmland* figures (Dracula, Frankenstein, Dr Jekyll and so on), who have actually been out of favour in the genre for two decades. Twitchell's particular loony notion is that all great horror stories spring from the incest taboo, and he laboriously goes through numerous variations of the basic monster scenarios to prove this.

As it is, one can indeed see trace elements of incest in the stories—indeed, after reading the book, one starts to spot intra-familial sexuality in every narrative that turns up on television from *Dynasty* to *Sooty and Sweep*—but surely, to take one example, the basis of *Dracula* is that taking partners from outside the family grouping of the Fearless Vampire Killers is what causes the horror to start. The slenderness of his central argument does not prevent Twitchell from making some penetrating comments (about horror films as rites of passage, for instance) and, uniquely, suggesting that perhaps, after all, our parents were right, and there is something unhealthy about all these monster movies.

KIM NEWMAN

TEXTUALISTS AND SCIENTISTS

TELEVISION AND ITS AUDIENCE International Research Perspectives

Edited by Phillip Drummond
and Richard Paterson
BFI Publishing/£19.95

Media researchers have often appeared as the pompous stating the obvious. We can no longer afford this luxury, however, if the cultural impact and educative value of television are to be defended. Throughout the western world, governments are attacking the foundations of public service broadcasting, and an ideology is in the ascendancy which treats television programmes as if they were merely economic goods and audiences as simply the consumers of those goods. Furthermore, and paradoxically, the self-same governments are developing potentially draconian legislation which is striking at the very heart of the viewer's right to choose what to watch.

Now, more than ever, it is important that we have sensible, sane and rational accounts of the media in which we take seriously the views, values and opinions of the audience. We must locate the audience in a real and palpable social world in which viewers are first and foremost members of families and occupations; are of a certain age, race, class and gender; are citizens of a state; in short, who live in real houses rather than the ethereal constructions of an analyst's mind.

This collection of essays is welcome in that it attempts to bring the audience back into focus after twenty years in which many media researchers ignored the real, live viewer. This has been especially true of those researchers in the UK who, in thrall to a small group of intellectual gurus resident in France, looked for the meaning of films and television programmes only within the closed world of the structure of the 'text'. Consequently, the audience was, at best, a shadowy presence on the edge of theory—an economic category irrelevant to the critical task. As these gurus successively detonated their structural theories of the text, the individual viewer of films and television programmes began to creep back into the analytical frame. However, we were still far from what actual viewers were really doing in front of television sets in houses built of bricks and mortar.

We were either in a looking-glass world in which the screen became the basis for the

reconciliation of psychic divisions, or in the still mechanical world of the viewer as the decoder of a text. Furthermore, many of these text-oriented theorists distrusted the techniques of social science, such as surveys, laboratory testing, or even small-group discussions. At one time it appeared that David Morley's work on the audience for *Nationwide*, in which he conducted group discussions in order to develop his theory of decoding, was the only one which the 'textualists' would accept (a fact not unrelated to Morley's left-leaning politics and his use of the textualist paradigm).

Morley kept a small flame of good sense burning; but his methods were somewhat impressionistic and his samples small. His work did, however, influence the next twist in the tale—the celebration of the audience. The Channel 4 series, *Open the Box*, exuberantly attacked many of the po-faced and self-important theories which had flourished during the reign of the textualists. It correctly identified with the real lives of the people who were watching and accepted the value of their interpretations of the programmes they watched.

While these twists and turns in the textualist tale were occurring, the other research traditions in the area, with their roots in sociology, psychology and anthropology, continued with their work. One of the pleasures in this volume is to see how these traditions contribute to the understanding of the audience. The book is divided into eight sections, four of which contain studies based on research with actual people. But these studies do not naively reintroduce empirical methods willy-nilly; they are theoretically-informed attempts to reconcile the statistical, sociological and anthropological techniques which provide insight in every other field of social theory, with the concerns of textual analysts.

This volume also provides evidence of a cross-fertilisation of media studies by insights from related disciplines. For instance, Kim Christian Schröder's article 'The Pleasure of Dynasty' draws on Victor Turner, whose work was so effectively applied to the culture of modernity by Bernice Martin in her much neglected book, *The Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change*. Schröder argues, correctly, that Turner's profound understanding of the process whereby television fiction allows the audience to reflect on their everyday lives and imagine how they might be changed could, and should, inspire fruitful research. Paddy

Scannell's article on the ways in which broadcasting structures and is structured by the rhythms and flow of everyday time and ritual time provides further evidence of how an anthropologically informed approach can yield insight into something as apparently simple as the scheduling of programmes.

This collection of essays from the 1986 International Television Studies Conference in London is, inevitably, good only in parts. However, it is to be hoped that it will fan the embers of reconciliation between the textualists and scientists and encourage a fuller understanding of the audience as both consumers and citizens.

DAVID DOCHERTY

MELIES TO DELVAUX

BLOOMSBURY FOREIGN FILM GUIDE

by Ronald Bergan and Robyn Karney
Bloomsbury Reference/£16.95

'The authors,' declares the jacket blurb of this reference work of 2,000-plus foreign-language films, 'wrote this book because it is one which they both needed.' And so, with a number of reservations, do we all, since it tawls those waters where Halliwell neglects to lower his hook.

The format is the usual one: basic credits (country, date, running time, production company; director, writer, cinematographer, composer, half a dozen stars), plus a plot summary and a capsule critical assessment. Necessarily, every reader is going to disagree with a few of the latter. But Bergan and Karney seem (barring the occasional red-rag reaction to feminist themes) fairly even-handed in their opinions. Above all, the lay-out is clear and usable, though there are some very badly printed pages in my review copy. No major problem so far.

Nor can one fault the book's chronological span: from Georges Méliès' 1902 *Voyage dans la lune* to titles as yet unreleased in Britain such as Krzysztof Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Killing* and André Delvaux's *L'Oeuvre au noir*. But the net, widely cast though it is, has ended up rather weighted down with European catches: at a rough count, French, German and Italian films easily outnumber all the rest. French films, indeed, account for around a third of the entries.

But that, too, is understandable, given current patterns of foreign film viewing: Bergan and Karney quite rightly focus on films distributed in the UK and the US, plus ones shown at major festivals or programmed by the

NFT or MOMA. They do claim in their introduction to range a little wider than that, though, so it seems worth asking why Alexander Askoldov's 1967 masterpiece, *The Commissar*, a high spot of every 1988 festival since it was unshelved at Moscow in July 1987, is not included. Spain, too, seems rather under-represented. Surely, for example, one of Pedro Almodovar's three films (*Matador*, *The Law of Desire* and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*) ought to be in, as should Manuel Gutiérrez Aragon's *Half of Heaven* and Vicente Aranda's *El Lute*.

But it is on the basic editorial side that the real problems arise. One's memory of a film does not always include the precise title, and a couple of indexes, one by director, one by country, would have helped enormously. The inflexible house style has its drawbacks, too, since giving every word in a title a capital letter is contrary to usage in a number of languages and grammatically wrong in German.

Worst of all, film society programmers, not to mention academic and other researchers, are going to be hampered by some very sloppy proof-reading (at least one hopes it is that), which gives us, among others, *Il*

Clowns for I Clowns (Federico Fellini, 1970), *Nous Sommes Tous Les Assassins for Nous sommes tous des assassins* (André Cayatte, 1952) and *Die Vierde Man for De vierde man* (Paul Verhoeven, 1983). It is a shame that so much work should have been undermined so late in the day, because Bergan and Karney have otherwise undertaken a daunting task with intelligence and vigour.

NICK RODDICK

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ADAM BARKER is a freelance journalist on film and television . . . PETER BRUNETTE teaches English at George Mason University, Virginia, and is the author of *Roberto Rossellini* (OUP) . . . IAN CAMERON produces books and publishes *Movie* . . . THOMAS ELSAESSER is Chairman of Film Studies at the University of East Anglia . . . JONATHAN KEATES is a writer and critic who contributes regularly to the *Independent* and the *Observer* . . . KIM NEWMAN has written *Nightmare Movies*, a critical history of the horror movie 1968-88, published by Bloomsbury . . . ANNE THOMPSON is a freelance journalist based in Los Angeles.

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John Wyver is a freelance writer and television producer. He has produced programmes for Channel 4 in Britain, has written for *Time Out* and *City Limits* and is co-author (with Mike Poole) of *Powerplays: Trevor Griffiths in Television* (BFI Publishing).

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Basil Blackwell

Masterclass

SIR,—As one of the 'murmuring, inarticulate' National Film and Television School students whom John Boorman describes in his article on the Movie Masterclass series, I feel I must raise a few monosyllabic belches of protest at the way my peers and I have been so maligned.

We are accused of wanting to be directors without wishing to learn our craft first. It may surprise Mr Boorman that the students he saw want to be animators, editors, sound mixers, cameramen and women, etc, as well as directors, and that when we are not gawking tongue-tied in front of TV cameras we are busy acquiring craft skills. It is for this very reason that Mr Boorman finds student films 'well achieved, technically' though why he should find this 'depressing', given his praise of technicians, defeats me.

Mr Boorman admits that his visits to film schools are seldom. This is regrettable for two reasons: one—young apprentice film-makers would benefit from contact with such an experienced director; two—Mr Boorman might think twice before airing his prejudices in this way.

Yours faithfully,
PETER BRIDGMAN
NFTS
Beaconsfield

Missing Welles

SIR,—As an admirer of Orson Welles, I was most interested to read Jonathan Rosenbaum's 'Wellesian: Quixote in a trash-can' (Autumn 1988). However, this short feature proved to be more infuriating than enlightening regarding information about the availability of the unseen Welles material. What is really needed is an article answering the questions Welles' admirers must surely be asking: has *The Other Side of the Wind* been retrieved from the French courts and are the various fragments of the other films now cleared of copyright problems? (If so, perhaps Kevin Brownlow and David Gill could compile an 'Unknown Welles' programme.) I am aware that SIGHT & SOUND has already published just such an article ('The Invisible Orson Welles', Summer 1986) but this was over two years ago. Has no progress been made since?

In addition, two very finished works, *Filming Othello* and *The Fountain of Youth* (made for American television in 1958), seem to have disappeared from view. In fact *Filming Othello* appears to have vanished so completely that I can find no solid reference to the film since John Pym reviewed it from the Berlin festival in 1978. Neither of the recent Welles biographies by Higham and Leaming men-

tions it in their texts, although Higham lists it in his filmography under the title *The Making of Othello*. Accusations that Welles was paranoid and had a 'fear of completion' seem somewhat ridiculous when two films are completed, shown and subsequently buried.

Indeed, Welles may not have been wrong to see conspiracies against him everywhere. The American film industry may occasionally make concessions to 'art', as long as it comes in the safe form of a Woody Allen (a fine director but as far from a maverick as it is possible to imagine), but it has never been hospitable to the Wellesian strain in film-making, as the recent attempts to reshape Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* testify. The only equivalent of a Gilliam or Werner Herzog in the American cinema of the 1980s is Michael Cimino, whose films have suffered from studio cutting reminiscent of that carried out on *The Magnificent Ambersons*.

It seems somehow symptomatic of current attitudes that the industry is prepared to restore 40 minutes of lost footage to *The Happiest Millionaire* (as Disney did in 1984) but has not bothered to make available a full version of Sam Peckinpah's masterpiece *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, a film which in its original form may have resembled *Citizen Kane*.

Yours faithfully,
BRAD STEVENS
Luton
Beds

John Howard Lawson

SIR,—I was slightly appalled by Richard Trainor's piece on the dearth of films portraying the Hollywood blacklist (Summer 1988) because he failed to mention John Howard Lawson, perhaps the one member of 'The Ten' best prepared for the fury of the right wing in his own country.

Contrary to some of those named by Mr Trainor, Mr Lawson never gave up, betrayed no one and answered the HUAC interrogators with questions of his own; he led the fight to reverse the tide of reaction in the US.

Mr Lawson had no illusions about Hollywood, yet he stood and fought. He was also sentenced to prison for one year, but prior to his incarceration he wrote: 'Those who applaud Hollywood's occasional "New Look" ventures are motivated by a desire to find some crumbs of comfort in what they basically regard as a hopeless situation; it seems "hopeless" because they are overawed by Wall Street's cultural dominance, unwilling to concede the possibilities of a broad movement for a democratic culture.'

LETTERS

Mr Lawson was deprived of his right to ply his trade after this, but he never lost his positive point of view—and he never gave in. Mr Lawson is dead, but we've inherited his memory; please don't allow his remarkable deeds to go unremembered.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN HUNT
Hollywood

Old Mother Riley

SIR,—I am preparing a book on the life and work of Arthur Lucan and Kitty McShane ('Old Mother Riley and her Daughter Kitty'), a major part of which will concentrate on the films they made together from 1936 until 1952.

If any of your readers worked on any of the Lucan and McShane films, I would be most grateful if they would contact me at 56 The Street, Poringland, Norwich, Norfolk NR14 7JT.

Yours faithfully,
ADRIAN WRIGHT

GPO/Crown

SIR,—I am researching into the wartime activities of the GPO/Crown Film Unit and would be grateful to hear from anyone who worked at the Unit, in whatever capacity, during the years 1939-1946. Please contact me c/o Dept. of Political Theory and Govt., University College Swansea, Singleton Park, Swansea, SA2 8PP.

Yours faithfully,
SCOTT GEDDES

Blasphemy

SIR,—The British distributor of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* has performed the unsightly miracle of a refreshment interval at roughly the juncture between the marriage feast at Cana and the raising of Lazarus; a commercial break clearly qualifying as artistic blasphemy.

Yours faithfully,
TONY BOYLE
Newcastle upon Tyne

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Long Live the Lady!*

CANNON for *A Short Film About Killing, South.*

CURZON for *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs.*

FILM PLAN INTERNATIONAL for *Scanners.*

INITIAL PICTURES for *The Rachel Papers.*

MARIN KARMITZ for *Une affaire de femmes.*

ORION PICTURES for *Hôtel Terminus.*

PALACE PICTURES for *High Hopes, Videodrome.*

RANK for *Dead Ringers, The Dressmaker.*

SACHER FILM for *It's Happening Tomorrow.*

SPECTRE PRODUCTIONS for *The Return.*

THE RECORDED RELEASING COMPANY for photograph of Jeremy Thomas.

UIP for *Tucker, A Fish Called Wanda.*

WARNER BROS for *Bird.*

IAN CHRISTIE for Riga forum photograph.

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE for photographs of David Puttnam and Paul Fox.

BRITISH TELECOMMUNICATIONS PLC for picture of satellite dish.

CHANNEL 4 for photograph of Richard Attenborough and Michael Grade.

MATTHEW FREUD ASSOCIATES/BOYD'S CO for *War Requiem.*

GE AEROSPACE DIVISION for Astra satellite.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE for MOMI exhibit.

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE for photograph of Jeremy Isaacs.

CYRIL RYAN for photograph of Anatole Dauman.

SUNDANCE INSTITUTE/LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION for photographs at the Sundance Institute.

TBI for photographs of Silvio Berlusconi, Rupert Murdoch, James Gatward and Leo Kirch.

NFA STILL COLLECTION for *Lindenstrasse, Fahrenheit 451, Day for Night, Il Posto, I Fidanziati, Nosferatu, The Last Laugh, Tartuffe, Faust, Schloss Vogelöd, The House on Trubnaya*, pictures for 'Mackendrickland', photographs of F. W. Murnau, Rouben Mamoulian, John Houseman, Trevor Howard, Ella Raines.

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ON NOW

■ THE BIG BLUE

(Fox)

Infuriatingly erratic combination of the breathtaking and the banal. A lifelong contest between two 'free divers', able to submerge for long periods without breathing gear, is the pretext for some magnificent seascapes, delightful dolphin sequences, and a doomed romance with Rosanna Arquette who has been thanklessly marooned in the role of frustrated bystander. Never quite deciding between swashbuckling comedy or introspective charm (the placid impassivity of newcomer Jean-Marc Barr is overwhelmed by extravagant mugging from Jean Reno), Luc Besson settles for existentialist travelogue, massive in visual and musical impact but otherwise decidedly low-wave. (Paul Shenar, Griffin Dunne.)

■ CRAZY LOVE

(Mainline)

First feature from the new Belgian *wunderkind* currently being promoted by Coppola. Adapted from three stories by Charles Bukowski, it's basically a rites of passage movie, tracing one man's solitary quest for love from 12-year-old first fumbblings and the acne-pitted agonies of 19-year-old adolescence to, at 33, the sad, drug-hallucinated fulfilment of necrophilia. Tenderly and wryly funny (the adolescent Frankenstein hopefully turning himself into the Invisible Man by swathing his head in toilet paper so that he can ask his dream girl to dance), it is beautifully shot, assured in its evocation of period (the music helps with the changes), laced with the intimation of horror characteristic of Flemish art, and a little obvious in the way the three stories are strung together to constitute a theme. (Josse De Pauw; director, Dominique Deruddere.)

■ THE MODERNS

(Rank)

It's 1926, and a burly, brooding American is propping up a Paris bar in studied macho pose, dispensing pithy epigrams about the human condition, when a matronly tourist from Iowa recognises the young literary lion of *The Sun Also Rises*. Ah yes, her friend delightedly concurs, Fitzgerald. In one fell swoop, Alan Rudolph gets over the problem of introducing historical figures, pricks the bubble of the Expatriate generation, and announces the movie's theme as an exploration of the fine line between real and fake. While Gertrude Stein and Hemingway posture on the fringes, an unsuccessful expatriate (Keith Carradine) tries to maintain his artistic

integrity while earning his living as a cartoonist; while being tempted by a gallery-owner (Genevieve Bujold) to pay his bills by exploiting his unwanted talent as an art forger; while being seduced by promises of sexual delight from a voracious titled lady (Geraldine Chaplin) into abetting a scam by copying the fruits of her profitable marriage (canvases by Modigliani, Cézanne and Matisse); and while being drawn into a deadly duel with a gangsterish *nouveau riche* art collector (John Lone) for possession of the girl he loved (Linda Fiorentino) until the collector 'collected' her beauty. A dazzling kaleidoscope in the manner of *Choose Me*, with period Paris persuasively recreated in Montreal, it's a witty, beautifully acted, teasingly provocative examination of art as exploitation. (Wallace Shawn.)

■ SALAAM BOMBAY!

(Mainline)

Notable first feature from US-trained documentarist Mira Nair which deftly interweaves little tales, both sentimental and moving, of vivid Bombay life with the central story of the dauntless efforts of the teaboy Krishna to earn enough money to return to his village and repay a family debt. Shot on location in the red-light district near Grant Road station and in the prisonlike confines of a children's home, and using a cast taken mainly from the streets and drilled in improvisational workshop classes, the film's bootlace production—with money from France and Channel 4—is an achievement in itself. There are neorealist echoes in the tone, but the pace, the Bombay glitter and the quality of never-say-die about the amateur cast members is wholly singular.

■ BLUE JEAN COP

(Rank)

Crusading lawyer (Peter Weller, last seen in armour in *RoboCop*) and shaggy 'tec (greying Sam Elliott) vs. drug-dealers and a ring of cops on the take. Director James Glickenhaus, an action specialist, opens with issues of justice and corruption on the gritty streets, but ends with cheer-along stunting as Elliott single-handedly goes after a planeload of bad hats.

■ THE EVERLASTING SECRET FAMILY

(Cannon)

Recruited into a secret rent-boy network servicing some of the country's leading politicians, a young man finds an obscure revenge in medical treatment which preserves his appearance for decades. Elegantly shot but flatly executed, a morosely comical fantasy vainly grasping for significance. (Arthur Dignam, John Meillon; director, Michael Thornhill.)

■ GORILLAS IN THE MIST

(Warner)

Respectfully photogenic account of anthropologist Dian Fossey's obsession with the mountain gorillas of Rwanda. Sigourney Weaver's resourceful

performance gives considerable strength to what would otherwise be a lightweight allegory about the prizes and perils of wilful independence. (Bryan Brown, Julie Harris; director, Michael Apted.)

■ HIGH SPIRITS

(Palace)

A misbegotten supernatural comedy, with Peter O'Toole faking a haunting at his Irish castle and a deluge of genuine ghosts turning up. A large and talented cast run about an impressive set shouting witlessly at each other, and director Neil Jordan unhappily fumbles even the most basic slapstick. (Daryl Hannah, Steve Guttenberg.)

■ THE LIGHTHORSEMEN

(Medusa)

Heroic, wide-screen recreation of the 'legendary' charge of the Australian Light Horse on the Turko-German emplacement at Beersheba in 1917. Tactical explanations are confidently interwoven with a variety of fictional subplots, the most prominent of which—about the volunteer whose bravery under fire cannot be squared with his inability to return it—is marked by a refreshing lack of condescension. Old-fashioned with an elegiac undertow. (Peter Phelps, Tony Bonner; director, Simon Wincer.)

■ MAPANTSULA

(Electric/Contemporary)

A bleak stare at the surface of daily life in Soweto is the chief strength of a brave—and, since the black protagonist is initially seen as a vicious spiv, uncomplacent—venture into making a South African feature from an oppositional stance. The awkward narrative structure impedes involvement but only partly detracts from the picture's sense of conviction. (Thomas Mogotlane, Marcel Van Heerden; director, Oliver Schmitz.)

■ PASCALI'S ISLAND

(Virgin)

An Aegean outcrop of the tottering Ottoman Empire is the atmospheric setting for what starts out like a period thriller and shades into an interplay of personality between local Turkish spy (Ben Kingsley) and enigmatic English visitor (Charles Dance). Both leads are well deployed and despite some overstated melodrama at the climax, this is expertly gauged as the cinematic equivalent of a 'good read'. (Director, James Dearden.)

■ RED HEAT

(Columbia Tri-Star)

Glasnost has gone so far that Walter Hill can shoot the beginning and end of this cop drama in Red Square. Thereafter, the message is rather anti-*glasnost*, since it's the unreconstructed, bullyboy tactics of Russian cop Arnold Schwarzenegger that are admired by contrast with his Miranda-bound Chicago colleagues. Brutally efficient in the unreconstructed Hill manner. (James Belushi, Peter Boyle.)

■ SCROOGED

(UIP)

Pitiless Bill Murray, a TV exec determined to hype his live *Christmas Carol* to the top of the holiday ratings, is reprimanded by the three famous spirits, of which Carol Kane (Christmas Present), a piping two-fisted fairy, is the most taking. Pacy, entertaining and suitably sentimental. (Karen Allen, Robert Mitchum; director, Richard Donner.)

■ SHORT CIRCUIT 2

(Columbia Tri-Star)

Number Five, the living robot, goes to New York to help his pal manufacture toy robots: he winds up working for bank robbers. The hero is a triumph of special-effects technology; but the formula plot—complete, again, with Fisher Stevens' witless Indian—remains just that. (Cynthia Gibb; director, Kenneth Johnson.)

■ STAND AND DELIVER

(Warner)

Factually based story of a dedicated teacher who realises that the semi-delinquent kids in a Los Angeles *barrio* school aren't trying because they know they are no-hopers in a racist society. He inspires them to study calculus; dazzling exam results; accusations of cheating; truth wins out against prejudice. Likeably laconic on the surface, but as hollow inside as *The Blackboard Jungle*. (Edward James Olmos, Lou Diamond Phillips; director, Ramon Menendez.)

■ STORMY MONDAY

(Palace)

Newcastle becomes a spiritual outpost of Los Angeles in a crime yarn which proves unduly self-conscious in its juggling of film noir components. Roger Deakins' acute cinematography and a practised display of velvet glove snarling from Tommy Lee Jones are not quite enough to wrest the chicanery and car bombing from the grasp of *déjà vu*. (Director, Mike Figgis.)

■ WILLOW

(UIP)

A combination of *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings* and *Three Men and a Cradle*, with heroic elves protecting a newborn saviour from a wicked queen. A long quest, with a deal too much cuteness, redeemed by excellent action and production values. One toboggan-ride is almost worth the price of admission, although the monsters are disappointing and the lovable little people are fairly annoying. (Val Klimer, Joanne Whalley, Warwick Davis; director, Ron Howard.)

■ YOUNG GUNS

(Vestron)

A brat pack Western, with Emilio Estevez, Kiefer Sutherland, Charlie Sheen and others as Billy the Kid and his gang in a fairly standard version of the oft-told story, free from the frills of a Penn or Peckinpah. Muddily realistic, but mainly an excuse for the young actors to get on horses and play at being cowboys: *Chisum* for the 1980s. (Director, Christopher Cain.)

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